

UC-NRLF



\$B 111 910









# HAGAR LOT;

## The Fate of the Poor Girl.

BY PIERCE EGAN,

AUTHOR OF "THE FLOWER OF THE FLOCK", "LOVE ME, LEAVE ME NOT", "THE WONDER OF KINGS"  
"WOOD CHASE", "IMOGEN" "THE SCARLET FLOWER", ETC., ETC.

---

NEW-YORK:  
DICK & FITZGERALD  
NO. 18 ANN STREET.

ALUMNUS



THE JOURNAL OF THE

THE JOURNAL OF THE

THE JOURNAL OF THE



# HAGAR LOT;

OR

## THE FATE OF THE POOR GIRL.

### CHAPTER I.

"A strange, wild tale of sin and sorrow—  
Sorrow because of sin—hence sorrow comes—  
And throbs of heated brains, and pangs of hearts,  
And sorrow worse than physical wounds—this tale  
He tells, not of himself, but others."

—OLD PLAY.

In order that the story we are about to tell may be better understood, it is our purpose to go back ten years from its commencement, and introduce the characters in previous scenes.

Constance Plantagenet was the daughter and sole child of Pierrepont Spencer Neville Plantagenet, and Lady Henrietta Plantagenet—descended from an old family, and allied by both sides of the house to those of the highest rank in the British peerage. Tall and commanding in person, handsome in face and figure, and graceful in every movement, she commanded universal admiration in the society amid which she mingled. But from her parents she inherited a cold and artificial manner. If she had what is known as "heart", the knowledge appeared confined to her own breast, and perhaps that of her foster-sister, Fanny Shelley, who appeared to be her sole confidante.

With a girl like Constance, and under the tutelage of such parents, it was not to be expected that mere affection would guide her in the choice of a husband. So, when her father announced to her that he had accepted an offer for her hand from the most noble the Marquis of Westchester, it was natural enough that she should yield to her father's order without demur; for, was not the lover, though more than twice her age, noble, wealthy, and of commanding influence? Yet it was not without a fierce struggle that she accepted the alliance, for there was a terrible secret behind—a secret to be hidden, if possible, forever.

She was already a wife and a mother.

One year before, she had been clandestinely married at the Church of St. Mary's, Hove, to

Viscount Bertram, the only son of the Earl of Brackleigh—the latter a nobleman of penurious habits, and supposed to be very poor. The only witnesses were: the curate, Sidney Reyner, who solemnized the marriage; the clerk, John Smith, and Frances Shelley, the foster-sister of the bride. Estrangement, however, grew between the couple so much so, that the wife concealed from her husband the fact that she was about to become a mother, and, finally, the birth of her child, a daughter. This child was placed by Fanny Shelley, who was thoroughly devoted to her young mistress, in charge of a nurse.

When the Marquis of Westchester proposed marriage to Constance, she sought an interview with the Viscount. She told him of the offer she had received, and, also, that she knew he was half engaged to a Miss Grizzle, the daughter of a very wealthy railroad-contractor, and she proposed to annul their marriage in an original though not exactly a legal way. The curate who had solemnized it had joined the Church of Rome, and was a missionary in foreign parts—never, in all probability, to return; the clerk was dead, and the remaining witness, her maid, was thoroughly devoted to her, and would be sent away. It was then but to destroy the certificate of marriage, and the thing was done. An altercation ensued; but, in the end, the strong will of Constance triumphed. Her wedding-ring was crushed to fragments beneath her heel, the certificate burned; and the two parted, as they supposed, forever. In a short while, Viscount Bertram married Miss Grizzle, and Constance became the Marchioness of Westchester.

There was, however, a witness unknown to both, of their final interview. That was Nat Ferret, the Viscount's groom, who had overheard the whole interview, and intended it for the purpose of extorting money. As he was foolish enough to engage in a robbery, in the interval, he was convicted of the offence, and transported for a number of years.

Fanny Shelley took the child, and went to her native home in Beachborough. Her appearance, under the circumstances, occasioned infinite scandal, and estranged her from her lover, Stephen Vere. A quarrel ensued, and, shortly after, a body, identified as that of Fanny by some of the clothing on it, was found in a pond. Stephen was arrested, charged with the murder, and acquitted for want of evidence. He soon after emigrated to Canada. The parents of Shelley did not long survive, and the infant grew up under the paternal care of the villagers, and, especially, of Susan Atten.

Five years had passed away when the Marchioness of Westchester, who had part of the time been on the Continent, and had heard nothing of the death of Fanny, took it into her head to visit the Abbey at Beachborough, which had been an estate of her father's, but then in her husband's possession. While there, some of the guests discovered an interesting and beautiful child, known generally as the Poor Girl. Some inquiries being made about her, the Marchioness discovered, to her horror, that it was her own, and learned of the death of Fanny. In her terror, she determined to have the child disposed of, and hired a handsome gipsy woman, named Hagar Lot, to steal and carry it away. The gipsy, aided by one of her own race, Liper Leper, who was enamored of her, did so, and placed it in charge of a gipsy couple—Daddy Windy and Diana, his wife. These used the beauty of the child for money-making, and, by sending her abroad to sell flowers, and sing, reaped a golden harvest.

The Viscount Bertram, through the death of his father, became Earl of Brackleigh, and then it was discovered that the old Earl, instead of being poor, was only miserly. The new Earl found himself exceedingly rich. In the course of events, the Earl and the Marchioness met. Incidents in their meeting, together with the events at Beachborough, engendered suspicion in the mind of the Marquis of Westchester, and he commenced a patient investigation. Similar suspicions took possession of the Countess of Brackleigh, with like results.

Five years more elapsed, and a change took place in the fortunes of the Poor Girl. She went to sing at Ascot Races, and to these at the same time came the Westchester and Brackleigh families; the carriages of both, by accident, being drawn up side by side. Here, too, came to see the races Susan Atten, with her lover, Harry Vere, and his friends. With the Earl of Brackleigh came also a young nobleman, Lord Victor, who had once before interposed to shield little Floret—for so the Poor Girl was named—from ill-treatment, and for whom she entertained feelings of childish gratitude. By an old song which the child sang, Susan Atten recognized her lost darling, and, aided by Harry Vere, and his friends, bore her off in triumph, in spite of an attempt made

by the gipsies to rescue her. At these same races, the Earl of Brackleigh had an interview with the Marchioness. His old love had returned with renewed force, and he threatened, if she did not return to him, to avow their several bigamies, and endure the consequences. The events of the day excited still more the fearful suspicions of the Marquis and the Countess, and set them more vigorously to work to penetrate the mystery.

Hagar Lot, at this juncture, found the Marchioness, and promised to steal the child again, and send her from the country.

Nat Ferret had now returned from transportation, on a ticket of leave, given to him for good conduct while in the penal colony, and at once proceeded to make market of his knowledge. He endeavored to obtain access to the Earl of Brackleigh, but was kicked out by the servants. Nothing daunted, he drew up a mysterious card, displaying his knowledge of the bigamy, and inclosed it to the Earl. This fell into the hands of the Countess, who at once appointed an interview with the writer. As both were proceeding to the place fixed on, Nat came across the Earl, to whom he opened his business. The Earl was alarmed, and after an interview, which the Countess, who had followed, managed to overhear, the peer took the groom home. The Countess, in the meanwhile, suspecting the Poor Girl to be her husband's child, anticipated the gipsies, and had her conveyed to the Earl's mansion, overcoming Susan's remonstrances. Both, therefore, had their several secrets under the same roof.

Poor Susan Atten had suffered, however, by her recovery of Floret; for her conscience would not allow her to burthen Harry with this charge. Their marriage was therefore postponed, to his great dismay. He yielded, however, and went to Canada to see his brother, Stephen.

What in the meanwhile of the Marquis and the Marchioness? The former pursued his investigations laboriously. He opened his wife's escritoire during a swoon of hers, and obtained from it a miniature of Bertram, a lock of the child's hair, and other trifles—all links in the chain; and potting down to Beachborough, endeavored to pump Dr. Bird, the medical attendant of the Marchioness when she was Miss Constance. From him he obtained nothing certain. The Marchioness, who felt the net closing around her, made a bold effort to cut its meshes. From Hagar Lot, she obtained a subtle and deadly poison, to hold in case of need, and then determined on a bold stroke. She repaired to St. Mary's Church, at Hove, and by amusing the clerk, managed to cut the page containing the record of the marriage from the book. Some one seemed to pass her at the time, and enter the vestry. She returned home, and locked the abstracted page securely in her escritoire. She felt now that her fate was in her own hands.



## CHAPTER II.

"A diamond coronet deck'd her brow,  
 Bloom on her cheek a vermell glow;  
 The terrors of her fiery eye  
 Poured forth insufferable day,  
 And shed a wildly lurid ray.  
 A smile upon her features play'd.  
 But there, too, safe portray'd  
 The inventive malice of a soul  
 When wild demoniac passions roll;  
 Despair and torment on her brow  
 Had mark'd a melancholy woe  
 In dark and deepened shade.  
 Under those hypocritical smiles,  
 Deceitful as the serpent's wiles,  
 Her hate and malice were conceal'd."

—THE WANDERING JEW.

Hagar Lot was stationed at the spot where she had parted from the Marchioness when the latter returned to Raby.

She conducted her in silence to her chamber within the antique hall by the same route as that by which she had departed from it.

The Marchioness briefly, almost curtly, bade her good-night upon the threshold of her room-door, and Hagar turned silently away as the latter entered the apartment.

While she was depositing the stolen register of her marriage with Bertram in her *escriitoir*, her chamber-door noiselessly opened, and a dusky figure glided in.

With swift but soundless step it crossed the apartment, and disappeared silently behind the massive drapery which covered the window.

There, crouched up in a small compass, it lay concealed.

Worn, weary, exhausted by excitement and fatigue, the Marchioness retired to rest, and was soon plunged into a heavy but perturbed sleep.

Close to her bedside, within reach of her hand, stood a small table, of slight make, but beautifully inlaid with brass and red porphyry. Upon it was her handkerchief, a bottle of ammoniacal salts, and small basket of gold filagree work.

Within that basket lay a bunch of keys.

The first rays of dawn cast a cold blue light within the chamber, and its ghastly beams fell upon the lithe, slim figure of a young man, who stood motionless by her bedside.

He removed the keys from the basket noiselessly, and glided with them behind one of the window-curtains, where he examined, by the rays of the fast coming day, each one separately and attentively.

He quickly selected one, and reappearing from behind the curtain, moved with cat-like tread to the *escriitoir*.

He applied the key to it, and it proved to be the right one, for he opened the desk readily.

A folded paper lay before him. He raised it, and examined it. He drew from his breast one resembling it, and folding it rapidly but silently, precisely in the same form, he laid it where the other had been placed, and putting the latter carefully in the breast-pocket of his coat, he locked the *escriitoir*, muttering:

"For the Wild White Rose. The bud shall blossom and bloom, and shall yet become the fairest flower of them all!"

He returned swiftly to the small table by the bedside, and restored the keys to the golden basket. Then he retreated to the door, opened it, and disappeared, closing it behind him, without making the slightest sound.

It was mid-day when the Marchioness arose, and her first act was to proceed to her *escriitoir*. She found there a paper apparently as she had left it, and proceeded to open it. She recognized, as she unfolded it, the coarse handwriting which she had seen in the book, and two or three signatures in female handwriting, but before she could completely open the sheet to gaze once more upon the record of her own legal marriage, she heard the sound of a footstep and the rustle of a dress.

She turned her head, and saw her attendant, Fane.

She sharply bade her leave the room, and return in two or three minutes. On the young woman obeying her, she hastily folded the paper into as small a compass as she could, and pressing a spring, revealed a nest of secret drawers within the desk, in one of which she placed it. She then re-locked the *escriitoir*, and, returning to her dressing-room, she seated herself and placed her hands over her eyes.

"What shall destroy my fame now?" she murmured. "Bertram?" she ejaculated, reflectively. A bitter smile curled her lip. "He cannot blight me with his new-found love, for now I can with safety dare the worst he can attempt. Let him say to the world, 'She is my wife,' I will answer, 'It is false! I challenge you to the proof!' Ay! where will he find proof? Shelley, the Curate, his Clerk—all, all gone—dead—dead! The register?—aha! aha!—I have that. Circumstances? No, we met in secret. We corresponded, it is true, but he has returned to me all the letters I ever wrote to him; and if he has not, there is not one which bears my signature—no, not one. It was so arranged. I remember that. The child—"

A wailing sob burst from her lips, but she pressed her eyelids lightly. She pressed her clenched fist upon her heart, and she stifled her emotion.

"He never knew of its existence," she groaned; "and he cannot—no, neither he nor any other living being can prove it to be mine! No—no—no!" she exclaimed, in a low, shivering tone.

She remained silent for a little while, plunged in the most intense reflection, and then, rousing herself, she added:

"Since, then, not even Bertram himself can prove me to be his wife, what have I to fear?—nothing! Besides, do I not hold in my possession the power of life or death—of commanding the secrecy of—my God, let me not think of that!"

She sprang to her feet, and rang a bell violently.

Fane almost immediately responded by appearing.

The Marchioness eyed her for a minute with a searching scrutiny, which made the girl become at first of the hue of crimson, and then a deathly white. She felt unpleasantly conscious that the Marchioness had become aware that her services had been purchased by the Earl of Brackleigh, and that she did not approve of it. She would have been delighted at that moment if she could have descended into the apartments beneath, as swiftly and as effectively as mysterious spirits do at theatres in demon dramas; but as she was not gifted with such supernatural powers, she was compelled to remain where she was, and bear the glance which—

"Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly, Keen, cruel, preceant, stinging."

"Fane," exclaimed the Marchioness, when she had completed her steadfast perusal of her features, "I regard you as being in my service only. If I should have further reason to believe that I am mistaken in this impression, I shall dismiss you—without hesitation dismiss you."

She paused. Fane remained silent. She understood the Marchioness's meaning, and was ready to faint.

Presently, the Marchioness inquired:

"Was the Marquis in London when you left?"

"He was, my Lady," she replied, in a trembling tone. "His lordship had just arrived from abroad."

"Abroad!" repeated the Marchioness, with surprise; "from what place abroad?"

"From Paris, I believe, my Lady," answered Fane.

Paris! Her father was at Paris. Had the Marquis been to see him? If so, upon what subject?

She mused. She had a shrewd and an unpleasant suspicion of the truth. She did not wish her father to be dragged into her differences with the Marquis. She felt vexed and angry that the latter should attempt to do it.

She turned her brilliant eyes upon Fane, and said, with a marked emphasis:

"Prepare for my return to London to-day, or at latest to-morrow morning; and mark me, Fane, if my intentions should be made known to any person beyond the precincts of the hall, you will have to suffer the consequences. They may prove calamitous to you," she added, in a lower tone.

Fane shuddered involuntarily. There was something singularly terrible in the tone of the Marchioness's voice—something yet more terrible in the sharp flash of her eye as she quitted the room.

Fane had previously observed that she was greatly changed, both in appearance and manner. She was unacquainted with the cause, but she was convinced that it must be something of a peculiarly grave character which had produced so marked an alteration in her.

She had at first a notion that the love of the

Earl of Brackleigh, as soon as she had become acquainted with it, had occasioned the change—but, upon reflection, she dismissed that impression, because she felt sure no woman feels demoniacal after receiving a declaration of love from a handsome and comparatively young nobleman, even if that love be naughty in principle, and not for a moment to be entertained; and she was certain that the Marchioness looked at her more with the expression of a Satanella than a seraph.

She was, therefore, at a loss to conceive what could have converted her fascinating, beautiful, and stately mistress into a frowning, evil-looking Circe. She could only, as she desired to retain her situation, decide upon refusing for the future to assist the Earl in his designs upon her mistress, and to give up all thoughts of that vulgar-tongued but smartly-dressed groom, who, having whispered to her that he believed he was a "spar-rer", and her lips "was" cherries, had kissed her with a kind of high-pressure action before she had any idea that he "drempt" of such a piece of saucy impertinence.

Although she had promised the Earl to meet him or his groom at an appointed rendezvous, she refrained from going there on the day she made preparations to accompany the Marchioness to London. For two reasons—firstly, because the Marchioness had by implication forbidden her; and secondly, she ascertained that the window of her mistress's sitting-room commanded the spot upon which she had already met the short, natty groom, and where he had fancied himself a sparrow and her lips cherries, and where, probably, the Marchioness had beheld the consequences of that delusion. Now, as she had a very powerful conceit, that if she went thither again, and should happen to meet the groom instead of the Earl, the man instead of the master, she she should find the former laboring under a very severe attack of the same delusion, she considered that it would be a wiser plan not to quit the hall again until she took her place in the rumble of the traveling-carriage beside Lady Henrietta's maid, for whom she entertained the bitterest objection, and with whom she knew that she should quarrel the whole way to London.

The Lady Henrietta, who had had enough of Baby Hall, especially as her skin was resuming its paper-like whiteness, and the blue-bottle had not so very greatly inconvenienced her as she expected, as, indeed, it might have done if it had been a large pearl quaffed in a draught of true Falernian, announced her readiness to depart as soon as the Marchioness was prepared to leave the hall. But her preparations were of a more extended character than those of her daughter; it was not until the next day, therefore, that she was ready to move.

The Marchioness caused it to be made known that they would leave the hall at four o'clock. She arranged and so contrived it, that the small cavalcade, well horsed and serv-



tanted, quitted it at two o'clock; and, consequently, as she expected; she did not see, in any direction, any sign of the Earl of Brackleigh or his groom.

They reached London late that night, and the Lady Henrietta slept at the mansion of the Marquis of Westchester.

Not a little to the surprise of the Marquis, who was at home, the Marchioness sent word to him that herself and Lady Henrietta would receive him at breakfast on the following morning.

At first he was disposed to decline the honor, by making some excuse of a previous engagement; but, upon reflection, he resolved to meet the Marchioness, and examine attentively her face, while, as if casually, he mentioned two or three circumstances, which, he felt assured, must probe her to the heart, and possibly elicit from her some confirmation of the suspicions he entertained.

The presence of Lady Henrietta, he believed, would give him an excellent opportunity to carry his design into execution; and, eventually, he sent a message to them, to say that he would join them at ten in the morning.

As the clock struck ten, he entered the breakfast-room.

Both ladies rose to receive him. The Marchioness glanced at him. She saw that he was pale, and that his features, though rigid, betrayed that there was some terrible excitement bubbling, seething, boiling, beneath that apparently cold and impassible exterior.

Followed, at a respectful distance, by two powdered lacqueys, he advanced, with slow and stately step, saluted lady Henrietta and the Marchioness with stiff politeness, and took the chair which had been placed for him opposite the Marchioness, who presided at the table.

When the ladies had resumed their seats, the Lady Henrietta raised her eye-glass, and examined the features of the Marquis attentively, and did so with a species of well-bred ease and self-possession, which prevented so direct a stare being offensive in its character.

"Why, Westchester," she exclaimed, "your trip to Paris has not improved your looks."

He started, and for a moment, looked inquiringly at her; and then said, frigidly:

"I regret that it should not have had the result your ladyship appears to have anticipated."

"It has not, indeed," she replied, readily. "You should have accompanied us to Raby Hall. It was so unkind of you to refuse us; indeed, your lordship will pardon me, I thought it almost barbarous that you did not, even for a day or so, delight and honor us with your company."

He started again, and looked at her wonderingly.

"Positively cruel," she continued, removing her eyes from the face of the Marquis, and fastening them upon a cold partridge, to

which she directed the attention of one of the attendants, who immediately assisted her to half of it; "decidedly cruel. I am sure Lady Westchester was heartbroken about your marked absence—were you not, my dear Constance?"

The Marquis appeared, for an instant, astounded. He glanced at the Marchioness, and saw her beautiful lips curling with an expression of ineffable scorn.

"He recovered his self-possession, and resumed his frigid mien."

"Your ladyship's memory does not serve you faithfully, I fear," he said, in measured tones. "You will remember, Lady Henrietta, that I was not consulted at all in the matter. Your ladyship was indisposed, you required change and quiet, you naturally sought the companionship of your daughter, for it was scarcely to be expected that you would bury yourself in the solitude of the country quite alone. You expressed a wish, in a note addressed by your ladyship to me, that that solitude should not be disturbed, and I respected it."

There was a silence for a moment, and then he added:

"Your ladyship having mentioned my absence on the Continent, overlooks the fact that it would have been scarcely possible for me to have visited Raby Hall and Paris at the same time."

Without appearing to heed his sarcastic tone, she rejoined:

"Ah, yes, Paris; you saw Plantagenet, of course?"

The Marchioness listened for the answer with intense eagerness, although she seemed to be lost in thought while caressing a favorite Italian greyhound.

"I was not so fortunate," responded the Marquis, in a somewhat marked tone.

He wished the Marchioness to understand that he had sought him with a special purpose.

She knew instinctively that he had.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Lady Henrietta, in a tone of surprise; "how odd! Plantagenet is in Paris?"

"Was!" answered his lordship, laconically.

"Not there! Heavens! Where can he be?" she cried, with unaffected astonishment.

"At Raby Hall, I presume, by this time, Lady Henrietta," returned the Marquis, coolly.

"Raby Hall!" repeated Lady Henrietta, starting. "Gracious! What can be the meaning of such erratic conduct? He left London for Paris, I imagine, only a few days before your lordship. How could you possibly have missed him, and what can he want at Raby Hall?"

A sardonic smile, for an instant only, moved the lips of the Marquis.

"I apprehend," he answered, "that, less cruel than myself, he desired to see your ladyship while in retirement at Raby;" and then added, quickly: "I had a peculiar wish to have an interview with Mr. Plantagenet on a matter of the gravest moment—at least, to



me; but, on arriving at Paris, I learned that he was upon a short visit to Louis Philippe, at Neuilly. I followed him thither, but found that he had quitted it two days before my arrival, for Lyons. I followed him to Lyons—he had posted to Marseilles. I posted to Marseilles; he had sailed to Civita Vecchia. I sailed to Civita Vecchia, and he came out of the port on his return, as I entered it. I followed him back as fast as I could travel, but could not overtake him. I pursued him to London, and yesterday, at midday, I proceeded to Plantagenet House, hoping to catch him; but he had started half an hour previously for Raby Hall. I have dispatched a courier after him, to inform him that I am anxious that he should make an appointment, to grant me an interview, either at Raby, or here in London."

"What, in the name of all that is flighty and bewildering, could have induced Plantagenet to scour France in such an extraordinary manner?" ejaculated Lady Henrietta, in a bewildered tone.

"Some individual had some Sevres plates, and cups and saucers, a few nique gems, and other articles of that description, to dispose of," returned the Marquis, in an indifferent tone. "The man had offered them to Louis Philippe, but the French King thought the price too high, and the person proceeded to Rome, to submit them to an English connoisseur, who is there purchasing some of the wonders always on sale to the wealthy. Plantagenet secured his prize at Civita Vecchia, and returned instantaneously with it. I presume he has hastened to Raby Hall, to exhibit to your ladyship the treasures he has thus made his own."

"Doubtless," returned Lady Henrietta, with a slight yawn. "But he will have to display them to me in London. I could not journey again to that horrid Raby to see a few plates, and that sort of thing, however choice and unique they might be."

"I might almost be worth the trouble of asking a question to ascertain from you, Westchester, an explanation of the cause of your most vigorous but unsuccessful chase of papa?" observed the Marchioness, with complete self-possession, and with a tone of irony which stung the Marquis sharply. "How amusing it must have proved, if one could have seen it as one sees such flight and pursuit at theatres! More exciting than the scenes which entertained us at Raby Hall, Lady Henrietta? You really must have had some unusually serious subject, Westchester, to discuss with papa, to have chased him so severely and persistently?"

He gazed at her with set teeth and knitted brows. Her eyes were fastened upon his, but her beautiful face was free from all expression, save a cold, satirical, and even contemptuous set of her mouth, which made him inwardly chafe to observe.

"I had, Lady Westchester, a very serious subject!" he exclaimed, emphatically.

"I should like to hear it, Westchester?" she

rejoined, her smile of cold scorn betraying itself yet more visibly than before. "It is a woman's privilege to be curious, you know, Westchester," she added, in a tone which staggered him, it was so light and playful, and harmonized so ill with the expression upon her lip.

"You shall, Lady Westchester," he replied.

"Now?" she inquired, patting the head of her dog gently, and bending her eyes down upon it.

"Not now," returned the Marquis, a little louder in his tone, and with more emphasis. "Not now, but certainly before your ladyship goes out, either to ride or drive."

"Thank you, Westchester," she responded, and addressed an unimportant remark to Lady Henrietta, yet one which she knew would set her talking, and would give her time to think, or at least to nerve herself for the coming interview with the Marquis.

The rapid talk of Lady Henrietta was cut short, however, by the Marquis, who failed to hear a single word of her tiresome remarks. He rose up from a fit of deep and moody abstraction, and, bowing, quitted the chamber.

The Marchioness, almost immediately afterward, rose and conducted Lady Henrietta to her boudoir, and, on reaching it, she gave her a book, and bade her amuse herself with it during her absence. Before Lady Henrietta could utter a remark, the Marchioness left her marveling.

Left her wondering what to do with herself, now that her husband had started off to the place she had just quitted, and Plantagenet House was as dull and gloomy as Raby Hall had been.

The Marchioness, with slow and dignified step, took her way to the library of the Marquis, and passed through it to his study adjoining.

He was within it, seated at a library-table, arranging some papers, which appeared to be covered with a quantity of memoranda.

He started on perceiving her, and hastily pushed his papers up in a heap.

He rose up and gazed upon her with a troubled and inquiring eye—troubled because he could not understand her marvelous self-command, and her wondrous assumption of elevation of deportment, which placed him in her presence—in spite of his consciousness, not mean in its extent, of his own high rank—in a secondary position.

Steadfastly as he gazed upon her, he could not detect in her face any trace of conscious guilt. He knew intuitively that she was aware of his suspicions, that she had read them in his looks, his altered manner, and in his invendos. He knew, too, instinctively that she now stood before him to challenge, to dare all he could say to her; and yet, but for that cold, curling lip of scorn which scathed him, her countenance was all equanimity, clearer, pleasanter, happier—no, that is not the word—more unclouded, apparently freer from care, than he had seen it for a long time past.



What had happened, he could not divine nor conceive. Something to destroy utterly his nearly-completed chain of evidence, he did not doubt. The very thought made him feel sick at heart; not the less so because he guessed that he would be deprived of the power, probably, of declaring to her what he felt to be the fact.

She perceived instantly that he was perusing her features, with the hope of reading something there to give him an opportunity of pouring forth a flood of assertions, gathered from sources with which she was yet unacquainted, and she could not repress the contemptuous curl of the lip, which defied him to read on that fair and beauteous tablet one word more than she chose should appear upon it.

She broke the ice herself by saying:

"My curiosity, you perceive, Westchester, has wings; it has brought me hither with a somewhat unusual rapidity."

"Very unusual, Madam," he responded, sternly.

"Very unusual," she repeated, unheeding his cold tone. "But, then, one must have some change now and then, some little excitement to counterbalance the dullness we occasionally encounter, and so I have sought your lordship's cold, grave, grand, sublime presence, in the hope that I shall meet with something to amuse, if not interest me."

"It will interest you, no doubt, Madam," he replied, grating his teeth together, "so deeply, indeed, that you will probably never—"

"Stay, Westchester, [one moment," she interrupted, raising her hand. "Are we likely to be interrupted in a matter which is to possess such awful interest for me?" she inquired. "It would be a pity if that interest should be divided by the intrusion of a blundering servant."

He rang a bell. Almost immediately his secretary appeared.

"Mr. St. Maur," he said, "will you be good enough to leave the library for a time, and see that no one approaches it until further orders?"

Mr. St. Maur bowed, and retired.

"We are quite alone, Madam," continued the Marquis, "and we shall not be interrupted."

"That is well!" she exclaimed.

Then facing him, she fastened her eyes firmly upon his.

So brilliant, so piercing, so steadfast, was their expression that, for a moment, he turned his own away. But, only for a moment, to find settled upon her lip that curl of contemptuous scorn which stung him almost to madness.

"You have been desirous of obtaining an interview with Mr. Plantagenet, my father, my Lord, upon a subject of the gravest moment," she exclaimed, in a clear, firm, and resolute voice. "You traveled post some hundreds of miles to effect that object, and failed. Such remarkable anxiety to have an interview with

him must have sprung from no common cause, and admits an explanation."

"It does, Madam!" he exclaimed, sharply, even fiercely.

"I am here, Lord Westchester, to hear it," she said, in measured, dignified, emphatic, and defiant tones.

"You shall, Madam," he replied, almost gasping for breath. "Be seated," he added, motioning to a chair.

"No!" she returned, coldly; "I prefer to remain in my present position. Proceed, Lord Westchester, with your explanation."

He turned his face from her for a moment to remove with his handkerchief a cold, clammy, death-like moisture from his brow, and then he turned to her to find her as calm and self-possessed as before, but with the same bitter, taunting, scornful expression upon her lip.

### CHAPTER III.

"O man, vain man! poor fool of pride and pain.

Puffed up with every breath from Fortune's wavering vane!

Why that proud smile? Sad, oh, how sad shall be  
Thy acted triumphs, when th' illusion clears!

Thine eyes shall weep, if still the light they see."

—TASSO.

In the interview he sought with his wife, the Marquis of Westchester had resolved to be as cold, as frigid, distant, and haughty in his manner as it was possible to be; to speak in a freezing tone, and with averted eyes; to bring home to the Marchioness the damning crime of which he believed her to be guilty; to crush her to the earth by insulting and humiliating reproaches, and then to expel her with ignominy across his threshold for ever.

Such were the feelings he called up when she entered the library, such the demeanor he put on when she first addressed him. As he cast his eyes upon her beautiful face and graceful form, he felt himself prepared to meet with icy impassibility every attempt she might make at reconciliation, for that he believed to be her purpose; prepared to resist her blandishments, even though they advanced beyond a point which, as yet, they were far from reaching; prepared to frigidly and inexorably repel every look, gesture, movement, designed to divert him from his purpose—prepared for everything, in short, but her un concealed, ineffable scorn.

He was not prepared for that.

It disconcerted him, it cut the ground from under his feet; he did not know where to begin, he did not know how to begin, and he remained for a minute after she had desired him to commence his explanation in embarrassed silence.

Believing that she saw her opportunity now, she seized it:

"My Lord," she exclaimed, in a calm, unimpassioned voice, "I have seen of late an alteration in your manner to me, which has rather displeased me."

He turned his eyes sharply upon her with amazement in them.

"You appear to me," she continued, in the same tone, "to have something upon your mind which oppresses it—a burden from which you desire to release yourself, and to cast it upon some person who may not be thankful to you for the donation. If I have not volunteered to receive it, it is because I detest secrets, and have no wish to share any—not even yours, Lord Westchester—"

"Lady Westchester!" he exclaimed, in an angry tone.

"Do not interrupt me, Westchester, that is not the act of a gentleman, and I am right, I believe, in the opinion which I entertain that you desire to be esteemed as one," she rejoined, with a haughty gesture. "I say that I have observed an alteration in your manner toward me, my Lord, for which I am unable to account."

"I will enlighten you, Madam," he interposed.

"Again, Sir," she rejoined, with slightly contracted brows.

He shrugged his shoulders, and, with a gloomy look, remained silent.

"I repeat, my Lord," she continued, resuming her dignified, yet unconstrained tone, "that I cannot account for the change I have perceived in your manner; and, further, it is not my intention to trouble myself to speculate upon the matter, but to leave to you the satisfaction of elucidating the mystery. What ever it may be, I have what I presume to be a justifiable suspicion that I am in some way closely or remotely, connected with the alteration in your demeanor, and your desire to speak with my father, Mr. Plantagenet. I, therefore, confess to harboring a curiosity to know what it may be, and I am, as I have already told you, here to seek and to listen to your explanation."

"And I, Madam, am fully prepared to give it to you," he responded quickly, as she, for a moment, paused. "And, Madam—"

She had no intention of permitting him to speak at any length, she therefore waved her hand to arrest his speech, and then she suddenly assumed an air of imperious, haughty sternness, a determined firmness of look which had much that was menacing in it—and not idle menace either. The expression of her eye, as it rested, glittering like a diamond, upon his, startled him.

"You will remember, my Lord, ere you commence, and while you are speaking, who I am—who I was—before I consented to accept your name. If you are proud and tenacious of the name which I now bear, I set an equal value upon the name I inherited, and which I bore when I became Lady Westchester."

A strangely bitter smile passed over his sickly features as she uttered the last words; but though inwardly it disturbed her, outwardly she betrayed no sign that she had observed it. She continued:

"I, therefore, suggest to your lordship, that any vague observations—any silly surmises, the weak adoption of idle reports, which may

have the effect of indirectly casting a slur upon the name which I honor, and which I declare to be irreproachable—will be at once checked by me, and responded to in a manner which, however offensive it may prove to your lordship, I consider it to be my indefeasible right to have recourse to. Now, my Lord, proceed, for I find these preliminary observations tedious."

Stung by her haughty scorn, goaded by his maddening suspicions and surmises, he forgot his intention of acting and speaking as a scarcely-animated stone statue, but, trembling with excitement, he addressed her angrily and nervously, and his pale face became flushed.

She perceived that he had lost his self-command, and she resolved, quietly, that he should not recover it if she could prevent it.

"Lady Westchester," he exclaimed, trying to moisten his parched lips, and speaking with difficulty; "in observing a change in my appearance and in my conduct to you, your perceptions have not been at fault. Permit me to ask you if it has occurred to you to inquire of yourself whether, as there has been an alteration in my behavior to you, you yourself may not have occasioned it?"

"It has occurred," she replied quietly.

"And what response did it meet with?" he inquired, quickly.

"My contemptuous scorn," she replied, glancing at him with cold disdain.

He writhed.

"You brave it well," he said, between his teeth. "It will be my best course to be perfectly plain with you."

"It will," she returned, with a peculiarly significant tone.

He drew himself up, and, after two futile attempts, he said, in a voice which intense excitement rendered almost indistinct:

"You are acquainted with the Earl of Brackleigh, Madam?"

"So I am with some other noblemen whom you might name, my Lord," she returned, with a slight laugh.

"I say, Madam, that you are acquainted with the Earl of Brackleigh, and were before your marriage with me!"

She laughed again—a musical, ringing laugh, but yet so icy in its tone it made him shiver.

"Is that a crime?" she asked with apparent playfulness, but, in reality, with biting sarcasm.

"In you, Madam, yes!" he exclaimed.

"Indeed!" she replied, slowly, and elevating her arched eyebrows, as if she were amazed. "Why a crime in me, my Lord?"

"Because you meet him now, and in secret!" he responded, gutturally.

She looked at him steadfastly.

"Do you know this?" she asked, emphatically.

"I have the best authority for saying that you do," he returned, vehemently, yet evasively.

"Produce it," she rejoined, firmly.



"I can," he said; "but at present—"

She interrupted him by a burst of scornful laughter. She knew he could have neither authority for, nor proof of, what had actually never occurred, save once, and that was a merely accidental rencontre which she did not seek, would have avoided, and which lasted but a few minutes.

"You are jealous, Westchester—really, positively, ridiculously jealous!" she exclaimed, still laughing with the same scornful tone. "For shame! a man of your years ought, at least, to have reached the point of common sense—and of discretion!"

He stamped his foot angrily.

"I will not," he cried, vehemently, "have the name, fame, and honor of my house sullied by any person breathing. You, Madam, are my wife—"

"Stay!" she cried, in a voice as loud, but clearer and more commanding than his own; "I am the MARCHIONESS OF WESTCHESTER! Reflect, my Lord, and be more careful and more correct in your selection of terms."

He staggered back, and a ghastly paleness spread itself over his face. He gasped for breath.

She gazed upon him loftily and disdainfully.

"My Lord," she said, in tones it would be impossible to describe, save that they were of a nature to make him cower; "before you cast your eyes upon me, you were, and had been, an unmarried man. You selected me from the throng of women upon whom, year after year, you had thrown calculating glances—as you would, *par exemple*, a horse from a troop, or a deer from a herd—for the beauty of my countenance, the symmetry of my form, the dignity of my motions, and, for, withal—my breed. Disgusting as the description may sound in your ears, humiliating as it rings in mine, it is a just one; you chose me as you would an animal to place at the head of your stud. I was a creature who was likely to wear becomingly the coronet which symbolizes the elevation of your house, and to carry gracefully the name whose greatest merit, perhaps like that of Adam's, is that it has been borne for a lengthened period. I never disguised from myself the motives which governed you in selecting me for your Marchioness; and, though I come of a race older, nobler, and one which is even wealthier than your own, I consented to the sacrifice demanded of me—mark me, my Lord, I make no contradiction of terms!—the sacrifice demanded of me, because I desired to have the coronet. The purchase and sale were completed. I have worn, and I still wear, the coronet; you have paraded before the world your ideal of a Marchioness. In this our bargain has been faithfully fulfilled. But, my Lord, do not permit yourself to fall into an error. Pray, during our further discourse, suffer to remain unspoken those homely phrases, 'husband and wife'—titles which, as you must be surely conscious, do not properly belong either to you or to me!"

There are some matters to which women of delicate imaginings and fine susceptibilities will unhesitatingly refer, to which men who do not boast of refined minds could not allude without diffidence, if not a blush. This may, perhaps, be a solution of the distinction between true and false modesty. A woman knows so readily what should be spoken, and what left unsaid. It is, at least, certain, that women are far less guilty of false delicacy than men.

At the same time, men only can judge what could have been the feelings of the Marquis of Westchester on hearing those remarkable sentiments fall from the lips of his Marchioness. There was a bitter, stinging taunt implied, which not only lowered him greatly in his own estimation, but did so in spite of a keen sense that he did not wholly deserve the reproach. It was true that he might have acted differently, but pride and delicacy of feeling had withheld him from pursuing another course. He had hoped that time and his kindness would have wrought a favorable issue; it had brought him nothing but a cold, disdainful, insulting taunt; and, from the heart which was to have been adamant to even the silvery tone of her voice, it wrung a groan.

He paced the room for a few minutes, convulsed with emotion, and without attempting to disguise the intensity of the suffering he experienced.

At length, maddened by the thoughts which whirled successively through his brain, scorching and blistering it with the images they conveyed, he turned round, and advanced upon her with glaring eyes, and foaming at the mouth like a tiger.

"Woman!" he said, as the white froth bubbled on his lips; "when I first saw you, I believed that your—that your—past history—"

She turned upon him like lightning, and, with her finger pointed menacingly at him, she exclaimed, in a clear, firm, determined voice:

"Hold! Beware how you utter one word derogatory to my fame or name, as it bloomed ere I knew you. Remember, my Lord, our compact when you besought me to bestow my hand upon you. You may have forgotten it; let me remind you of it. I submitted to you a condition, that as it was not my intention to extort from you any *arrière pensée*, so I should expect that you would not attempt to exact even one from me. You accepted that condition. I have kept my part of the compact; you must keep yours. With what faults or follies I may have been guilty of before my marriage to you, you have now nothing whatever to do; it is too late, my Lord. You took me for better or for worse, and you must adhere to your bargain!"

"But woman—" he screeched.

"Marchioness of Westchester!" she corrected, in a loud, stern voice. "My Lord, you bestowed upon me that title, and you shall address me by it. If you fail to do so, I will quit your presence, and you shall humble



yourself to me ere I will condescend to see you again. Let me add, my Lord," she continued, with slow but intensely earnest emphasis, "that the name I now bear is as dear and as sacred to me as to you. Its irreproachable fame, its unsullied honor, its spotless integrity, and its elevated rank in the peerage of this kingdom have been as carefully studied, as anxiously preserved, and as constantly upheld and sustained by me as by yourself. From the moment I received the right—a cold thrill ran through her nerves as she uttered the words, though she did not betray the emotion—"to bear the name, I have never suffered the breath of a defamer to fall blighting upon it. My conduct as the Marchioness of Westchester has been unimpeachable. I defy contradiction—I challenge you to bring before me the highest as well as the meanest of those in whose circles we have mixed, to point out one perceptible spot in my conduct which is justly entitled to censure or reproach. You are pleased to be jealous—of what—of whom? Jealousy is always unjust, my Lord! Who should know that fact so well as a woman? Search for my character in the world in which we have both mixed; you will find, my Lord, unsullied, untarnished, irreproachable, as it always has been—as it will be my care to maintain it. But do not insult me by paltry assertions; by statements and by evidence obtained from disreputable persons, prowling in holes and corners, ready to sell lies to every credulous fool who seeks them—"

"But, Madam!" cried the Marquis, half bewildered by her arguments, "when irrefragable evidence—"

"Hear me out," she interrupted. "Do not degrade me by miserable insinuations and unworthy suppositions—suspicions infinitely more derogatory to those who give utterance to them than those who are compelled to listen to them. Do not do this; for I say to you, my Lord Marquis, for your reflection, that if all your discoveries, proofs, witnesses, are heaped up into one great mound, and that it enabled you to bring home to me crimes of the blackest dye—that it proved me to be the very vilest of my sex—it would result, perhaps, in my downfall, but also in your sure disgrace, the blackening of your name, the smudging of that reputation which you have so long maintained unsullied and unstained."

"What!" cried the Marquis, with sparkling eyes, "would you have me sit down tamely, and endure—"

"An untainted name, certainly," she interposed. "Understand me, my Lord: I do not know, nor do I care, what may be the nature of the aspersions of my fame to which, as yet, you have only alluded. I scorn them—I regard them with a contempt so supreme, that I will not consent to hear them. I regret that you should have been weak enough to listen even to that which might most have resembled truth. It is well, my Lord, that we should clearly understand each other, and now. You ought not to—I do not—disguise from your-

self the relation in which we stand to each other. One coronet crowns the head of both. Mutually we have to support its dignity and its honor. Let us do it. The world has believed, still believes, that we do. Are you anxious to deceive it, and to raise your standard with a black bar across your coat of arms. Be advised, my Lord; the past cannot be recalled nor redeemed. Beware how you proceed to my father to prefer any complaint which shall even impinge upon my purity; he will strike you with the back of his hand across the cheek, brand you liar and coward, and, old as he is, endeavor with his sword to stamp you as one—as I would, my Lord, were I in his place!"

"Death!" cried the Marquis, furiously.

She waved her hand to repress the observations he was about to make, and continued:

"As I would, my Lord, were I in his place, even though you brought the proofs of your dishonor in your hands. And wherefore? Because your disclosures, while they would not repair the wrong done, would bring down shame and disgrace upon the innocent, even more terribly than upon the guilty. I commend this to your attention. I do not, in what I have said, intend, even by implication, to place myself in a false position in your eyes. I repeat that my honor is beyond the reach of defamers, and I regard with unutterable scorn any and every attempt which may be made by fools or knaves to sully it, even though you, my Lord, head the noble band. One word more, and I have done. Although I refuse in justice to myself, to listen to your ignoble endeavors to destroy me, and to prove yourself to be—that which it is simply absurd to suppose that you could be by me—injured, I will revert to the name of one individual, whom you have been pleased to connect with my own—the Earl of Brackleigh. It matters not what I know of that individual, or when that knowledge was acquired, let it suffice that it was previous to my marriage with you, and that then, and now, and forever, I entertain feelings of contempt for him which cannot be surpassed, nor can ever be weakened."

"But," cried the Marquis, eagerly, "it is precisely before our marriage—"

"With which you have nothing to do," interposed the Marchioness, sternly. "Let me not have to repeat that I wish to see the man no more. I shall make it my endeavor to prevent the chance arising of ever meeting him more. And now, my Lord, I have brought our interview to a close. All that I could have expected from it has taken place. Whatever may have been your anticipations, you must be content with the result, and take it as it is. We now, and at this moment, part forever, or resume our relations as they have been, without, however, one allusion being made at any time to what has just passed between us. If it is your will that we shall part forever, I shall know it by receiving from you no communication between my departure from this room and an hour hence. If, on the contrary,



you are content to let the world maintain its inflated sense of your untarnished dignity, you will send to me, ere the expiration of an hour, a note, which will contain only the words: 'I assent.' I shall follow the receipt of that note by ordering preparations to be secretly made—you will not, my Lord, object, I know, to that part of the arrangement—to proceed abroad, say Rome, where we can make a stay for at least one, perhaps two years. The term will depend upon your Lordship, and—a—"

She hesitated; a flush of color went across her face, disappeared instantly, and left her deathly pale.

"What?" he inquired curiously, as she paused.

Her voice faltered.

"The duration of one of our lives," she added.

"In such case, the survivor would naturally return to England. Lord Westchester, I leave the decision in your hands. Do not complain if, in making your election, you should err, and your mistake should prove fatal. You, and you alone, will be to blame."

She bowed stiffly and grandly to him, and glided from the room.

He made a movement to stay her, but she was gone.

Bewildered, excited, astounded, overwhelmed by the mastery over him, which from the first she had seized, and to the last maintained, he gave way to an ebullition of frantic emotion, and flung himself upon the ground, with all the wildness and frenzy of a maniac.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"His business was to pump and wheedle,  
And men with their own keys unriddle,  
To make men to themselves give answers,  
For which they pay the necromancers  
To fetch and carry intelligence  
Of whom, and what, and whither and whence,  
And all discoveries disperse."

So Whaccham beat his dirty brains  
To advance his master's fame and gains."

—BUTLER.

The fever which attacked Floret was of the typhoid character, was exceedingly fierce and rapid in its progress, exhibited the most dangerous symptoms, and threatened to prove fatal; indeed, the physician, whose experience and skill in such cases were of no common degree, held out but the faintest hopes of her recovery.

Everything was against her; her organization was delicate, her mind had been weakened by long-indulged secret repinings at her equivocal condition; her frame, too, had been enfeebled by her hard way of life; and the seeds of the burning fever which now hugged her in its scorching embrace, sown some months back, had been slowly, but surely, undermining her strength. She lay wholly utterly prostrate—exhausted, destitute of the power of moving—a poor, little, weak, tender feather, whirled, powerless and helplessly, in the hot blast of fever. There was no arresting, no stiding, no stopping it. It was one of those diseases which no medicine yet discovered has

succeeded in making succumb to its curative properties. It would burn itself out, and it was a question whether it would not burn the child's life out as well.

All that could be done for her lay in the few simple rules to be observed in fevers—the semi-darkened room—airy, well-ventilated, sweet, and cool—diet but little stronger than water, and watching, careful, constant, gentle, and unflinching watching.

Floret had all this.

The Countess of Brackleigh, in whose breast Revenge had erected a throne, was intensely anxious that her little charge should not die; she, therefore, secured to her, during her illness, all the aids calculated to save her life which wealth could command.

She also readily consented to Susan Atten's entreaty to be allowed to be Floret's nurse, and did every thing which lay within her power, not only to lighten the violence of the malady, but to prevent its proving fatal.

It is not to be supposed that the coming and going of the Doctor, the injunctions which the servants received to go about the house noiselessly, and the almost constant confinement of the Countess of Brackleigh to her chamber, escaped the notice of the Earl, and he sought from Nat a solution of the mystery.

That functionary had prepared a note-book for the Earl, filled with lies, but of such a character as not to throw any light upon the jealous suspicions which his master had so absurdly formed, nor, indeed, to cast, even by insinuation, any slur against the fair reputation of the Countess. Nat was afraid to attempt to do anything of the kind; he was, in reality, too cunning. He was quite alive to the fact that the Countess had got him fast in her power, that she had extorted his secret from him, and that she had bribed him to give her further information on certain matters with which he was likely to become acquainted. He knew that he must, for his own safety and advantage, keep the Earl and his wife apart as widely as he could; he, therefore, arranged a plan by which he hoped to keep the Earl's suspicions alive, and yet to make him believe that the time was not close enough at hand to make a demonstration, because the proofs upon which such an outbreak must be based were not yet within his reach, although they might soon be. In this scheme he might have succeeded, but for the sudden appearance and the enigmatical movements of the physician backward and forward in the house, without any one but those actually in the Countess's private rooms knowing wherefore.

The Earl was aware that he might be able to arrive at the truth, or near it, by calling upon the physician, and simply demanding from him an explanation of the objects of his visits to the Brackleigh mansion; but pride forbade him. It was just possible that he might be informed that one of the Countess's maids was suffering from an attack of purple rash, or a sprained ankle, and that was a kind of ridi-



culus mis he was anxious to avoid. It was open to him to directly question the Countess; but he had somewhat shrewd misgivings respecting the manner in which she would receive his interrogatories, and the character of the replies she would probably vouchsafe him. He, therefore, ultimately decided to set Nat to ascertain, if possible, who it was that was the object at once of the physician's professional attention and the solicitude of the Countess.

Nat found his position, as a living pendulum, oscillating between the Countess and the Earl, the reverse of agreeable or comfortable. He was not at all sanguine that, if he tried his best to unravel what the Countess was evidently anxious should remain a secret, he should succeed; and was quite sure that the Earl would not remain placid or contented under the repeated asseverations which he foresaw he should have to make, that he was unable to discover anything more than the Earl was already acquainted with.

Assuming, however, that his efforts to unfold the mystery were crowned with success, and he revealed to the Earl the result of his discoveries, it would not be possible to keep from the Countess the knowledge that he had been the spy and the informer—and what then? He felt that he would rather brave the wrath of the Earl than the vengeful anger of the Countess; he, therefore, while appearing to follow out closely the instructions of the Earl, did so in a very mild form, and contented himself by picking up a few crumbs, instead of trying to secure the whole loaf.

However, in great establishments the means of communication are so varied, and yet the links are so directly in contact with each other, that it is scarcely possible to prevent any secrets having such proportions as that of the Countess's possession of Floret, although she was closely concealed in her chamber, from soon becoming known and whispered over the household. It is but too commonly the case that matters which husband and wife, or either, believe to be securely locked up in their own breasts, are known to and talked about by their servants; and, therefore, although the Countess might have been able to have kept unknown for a time the fact of Floret's being secreted in her private apartment, to which on one but herself and confidential maid, Subtle, had access, it was wholly impossible to maintain that secret when, on the child being attacked by illness, a doctor had to pass in and out of the house, and medicines to arrive and be delivered for the Countess, who was moving about as usual, and who, though rather careworn and pale in countenance, was yet more vigorous and stern in her daily actions than ever.

So Nat suddenly found a "horrid whisper" running among the men-servants, to the effect that there was "somebody" concealed in the Countess's chamber; and, being himself curious to know who that somebody was, as the knowledge might bring to his exchequer more of those golden reasons for rendering the gin-

palace and the orange sash a certainty, he cast about among the lavender-plush gentry, who engaged the Earl as their master, with the object of endeavoring to find one among them who knew the most of the matter, and to quietly draw off that knowledge in the most skillful way.

He was not long in discovering the person whom he sought. It occurred to him that the footman, who mostly attended the Countess when she went out in her carriage for a drive, was a likely person to have an inkling of the exoteric motives which influenced her exoteric movements; he, therefore, one morning, on finding that the Earl would not require his services, nor the Countess the attendance of the individual upon whom he had fixed his eye, affected to meet the latter casually, and, after a brief greeting, remarked, hypothetically, that "rum an' scrub" was a fine thing for the "stummick" on "drizzly mornin's". As it happened that a drizzling rain was falling, his fellow-servant drew up one corner of his mouth, and closed the eye nearest to it. Whereupon, Nat remarked:

"A vink's as good as an 'hodd to a blind 'oss."

And he jerked his thumb over his left shoulder, which his companion in lavender interpreted as meaning that in an adjoining street stood a tavern, where "rum an' scrub" as a mixture was to be met with. He thereupon again closed his right eye and drew up the right corner of his mouth simultaneously.

Within two minutes after these expressive signs had been interchanged, the two individuals made their appearance in the same "public" by different doors; and Nat requested to be favored with a quarten of the beverage which he considered so beneficial to his internal economy on damp mornings, and with two half-quarten glasses. He filled them both to the brim, and, handing one to his companion, he drank to their better acquaintance. The Countess's footman smacked his lips after having swallowed the contents of his glass, and he had permitted its fragrance to permeate through his palate to his nostrils; then he warmly expressed his admiration of the specific, and insisted that the two glasses should be refilled at his expense.

Nat quietly incited him to continue his libations, and—to parody the words of a poet who never obtained the laureate's crown of laurels, with its attendant annual of filthy lucre

Off the replenished goblet did he drain,  
And drank and sipped, and sipped and drank again;  
Such was the very action—the very action such—  
Until at length he took a drop too much."

During his progress from sobriety to maudlin inebriety, Nat contrived to extract from him all that he was able to communicate. It was not much, but enough to let him know that the somebody so carefully concealed within his lady's chamber was a child whom she had one morning taken up in her carriage, in a fainting condition, in the neighborhood of Knightsbridge.



As, soon after this revelation, he began to display a tendency to tears, and an indisposition to sustain himself erect, Nat thought it advisable to conduct him back to the mansion. When he reached it, he found a difficulty in disposing of his companion; for the operation of the liquor had been, though insidious, rapid. Although unable to stand, the latter declared himself anxious for a frolic, and in the same breath suggested a visit to a cemetery; he insisted on chanting the chorus of "Here's a Health to all good lasses", but moaned forth, in melancholy tones, "All in the 'Downs!'"

As this description of behavior was calculated to occasion a scandal in the household, in which he should have to bear the brunt, Nat contrived to smuggle this "sprig of lawender" as he termed it, into his own room, and to place him on his bed, in the hope that within an hour or two he would be able to sleep off the effects of his potations.

Having succeeded in calming his hilarious proclivities, and in soothing his succeeding lachrymose tribute to the memory of a departed "haut Lidyer", Nat lulled him off to sleep, by pretending to share his anguish at his bereavement, and to mingle his tears with "his'n".

As with emotions of lively satisfaction, he heard the nasal trumpet of the "sprig of lawender" announce that he had crossed the boundary of wakefulness into the land of dreams, he resolved to go through the process of ablution, in order to remove from his personal appearance all traces of the state of semi-fuddle in which he felt himself to be, for, in order to induce his companion to drink, he had partaken freely himself of the beverage he had recommended, and for which he had a sneaking kindness.

As he turned to quit the bedside, he encountered his master, the Earl of Brackleigh.

He was standing near to the partly-opened door, and had evidently been watching the latter part of Nat's proceedings with something more than a feeling of curiosity.

Nat shrunk from the fierce glare of his eye, and bent his head very much with the aspect of a cur who anticipates an unfriendly visit from a boot.

The Earl casting a penetrating glance on Nat's greasy, half-dirty face, his pink, flushed cheeks, and his diminished, twinkling eyes, said, in a low, short, stern voice:

"What is the meaning of this drunken orgie?"

Nat tried to moisten his lips with his furred tongue, and a thought passed through his mind, registering a doubt whether he would be able to speak clearly or not. Before he could settle the point with himself, the Earl repeated his question with angry vehemence, and there was such a savage ferocity in his eyes, that the expression recalled to Nat's memory his promise to strangle him if he should discover at any time that he had proved faithless to him.

He was seized with a panic, and without

stopping to reflect whether he could articulate clearly or not, he made a clean breast of the matter. He told the Earl of the stratagem he had employed to ascertain from Lady Brackleigh's footman if he knew whether any individual was concealed in her ladyship's apartment or not, and if any person, who that person was, and he related the success he had met with.

The Earl, as Nat concluded, looked petrified with astonishment.

"A child," he muttered; "a child! this revelation only increases the mystery. What child is this—whose child? Good God! She spoke of having her secret in this house."

His cheek blanched, cold perspiration stood in thick beads upon his foreheads, he gasped for breath, for he felt as if he should suffocate.

He at once believed that he was being fought with his own weapons.

He ground his teeth together, and clenched his hands.

"Death and hell!" he murmured, between his grating teeth; "it cannot be her child!"

He turned fiercely to Nat, and clatched him tightly by the arm.

"Have you seen this child?" he asked, with eyes almost starting out of their sockets.

"No," returned Nat, rapidly; "no, my Lord, I never seed nothink on it. I only heard on it from—"

He jerked his thumb over his left shoulder toward the bed, on which he had placed the "sprig of lawender".

The Earl gnawed his knuckles nervously, and presently added:

"What is the age of the—the imp?"

"The what, my Lord?" asked Nat, looking at him inquiringly.

"The child; how old is it?" returned the Earl, impatiently.

"I shol' say 'bout—'bout—twel' year—'bout twel' year ol'—she coult' be a day oller, I shol' say," remarked a very drunken voice behind them.

They both turned hastily, and beheld Lady Brackleigh's footman, upon his hands and knees on the bed, with white face, very disordered hair and neckcloth, and bleared eyes, staring directly at them.

He was balancing himself with much difficulty, and as he promised each instant to shoot forward on to the ground head first, Nat ran up to him and forced him back on the bed.

Nat turned his face round to the Earl as if to ask for instructions. The Earl's brows were knitted, and he appeared much excited.

He approached Nat, and, in an undertone, said to him:

"Does the filthy scoundrel mean to say that the child is a girl about twelve years old?"

Nat nodded affirmatively, in reply.

The Earl reflected for a moment, and his face became of a ghastly, livid hue.

"Can I have been tricked?" he soliloquized, mentally. "Can her marriage with me



have been an affair of convenience, in a sense I could never have dreamed of? My brain is in a flame. I must have—I will wring an explanation from her! Furies! if for such a creature as this deed will make her, I should have sacrificed. Constance—I—I will shoot her—myself! Curses! what a desperate revenge I will have!”

The guilty always believe those whom they may have some reason to suspect to be as guilty as themselves. It is enough for them if they harbor only a suspicion against the innocent, to force a conviction at once that they are—they must be guilty.

The Earl of Brackleigh no sooner conceived that he had reason to suspect Lady Brackleigh, than he believed at once the worst he could imagine.

He paced the room with disordered step, with the excitement and the gestures of a maniac. Nat felt alarmed, and his fears were not allayed when the Earl, approaching him, gazed upon him with eyes which glittered like those of a tiger.

He pointed to the drunken footman, and said:

“Inquire of that beast whether, as I suppose, it is the newly-acknowledged brat who is ill, and if so, what is the nature of the illness.”

Nat put the question to the footman, who replied, inarticulately—

“Tyf fever—tyf fever, ver bad—all kesh it—go through th’ ’ouse—all ’ouse die—all die. I shall foll’ m’ poor haunt Lidyer to th’ col’ chur’ yard. Oh! oh! wow! wow! wow!”

Nat crammed a pillow into his mouth, for he saw the Earl start and look aghast.

The Earl was a man who had a horror of all infectious diseases. He had an impression that he was extremely susceptible to disease, although during his life he had been singularly free from attacks of illness; but that fact he attributed to the precautions which he had always taken. When, therefore, he learned that he was in a house in which typhus fever had for some days been rampant, he all but fainted.

Self having invariably been his rule of life, he, in an instant, forgot almost everything which just before had nearly driven him delirious, and he thought only of the possibility of the seeds of the fever being already sown in his frame, and that they might shortly develop themselves, and striking him down, prove fatal to him.

Most men, with such a terrible suspicion pressing upon their brain as he had upon his, would have dared the contamination of the fever, and have forced their way to the presence of the wife and the child. His only idea was, to fly instantly from the spot, so that he should not be compelled to breathe the same atmosphere, and when at a distance, seek for an explanation by letter, although he would not now receive a written communication from his wife until it had been fumigated.

This weakness of the Earl is one by no

means uncommon, but the fact does not rescue it from being contemptible.

He turned to Nat, and said:

“Have you been near the sick chamber?”

Nat intended to have replied in the affirmative, but confused by the struggles he had to make to keep the footman quiet under the pillow, for he objected to being stifled, and alarmed by the appalling expression on the Earl’s face, he shook his head.

“Then!” cried the Earl, excitedly; “instantly pack up your clothes, and prepare to accompany me for a month’s travel on the Continent—I do not know where yet.”

He hastened from the chamber as he concluded, and Nat, immediately he disappeared, promptly removed the “sprig of lavender” from his bed, as he entertained a strong impression that the sprig would almost immediately prove very ill.

He guided him to the corridor, and then introduced him to the servant’s staircase, which, being well-shaped and narrow, gave the “sprig” an opportunity of proving the *facilis decensus*.

Nat heard him slide and bump, and roll and thump down three flights of stairs, and being mentally convinced that he would reach the bottom, he returned to his room, hastily washed himself, and having completed his toilet, he packed his clothes. Before he had finished, he received a summons from the Earl, and within two hours subsequently was with the latter and his valet on the way to Brighton.

The fresh sea-air prevailing there, the Earl trusted would prove a specific for the typhus fever, even supposing that he had already become slightly infected by it.

Lady Brackleigh was informed by the Earl himself of his departure from London, but not until he had quitted it, and then he did so in a brief note. He declined to tell her in what direction he had gone. She had thought proper, he reminded her, to bring an infectious fever into his house; and so long as there was a possibility of its being communicated to him, even through her epistles to him, he begged to be excused naming his whereabouts. He had no doubt they should meet again as soon as she would be likely to desire it; but he trusted that the event would not take place until the disease had not only been extirpated from Brackleigh Mansion, but that the possibility of conveying the taint in her garments was likewise entirely removed.

Lady Brackleigh felt bitterly wounded by this insulting communication. It, however, served to keep her resentment alive, and to make her desire for vengeance yet stronger and fiercer than ever.

She made no observation respecting the Earl’s sudden departure; she sent no complaining letter to her father; she did not make her attached young friend, Lady Adela Trevor, a confidant of her griefs or troubles, even to confide to her the cold-blooded manner in which the Earl in this last act had treated her.

She remained passive, seemingly emotionless, save that she bestowed the most anxious



and watchful care on poor little Floret. Not alone because she wished to preserve her life, that she might prove the instrument of her revenge, but because there was something so touching in the child's helpless and seeming friendless condition, that she could not bear that it should die thus.

In so fragile a frame, a fever fierce as that which had attacked Floret was not long in reaching its height, and the crisis arrived one evening while the physician was present.

It was an affecting scene, that moment when the poor little creature's life was oscillating upon the confines of existence and death.

She lay apparently bereft of life already. The physician, with his watch in his hand, held her wrist, and counted the beatings of her pulse, so feeble in its vibrations, that only his experienced fingers could have told that it beat at all. The Countess of Brackleigh bent over the waxen face of the child, watching her half-parted lips with an intensity of anxiety which cannot be described. Susan Atten crouched down by the bedside, convulsed with grief, her face buried in the coverlet, stifling the sobs, which seemed as if they would rend her bosom asunder. Lady Adela Trevor, like an earthly seraph, knelt and prayed to a merciful Almighty, for the admission of that little, frail, all but sinless soul, into the regions of eternal felicity, if it should please Him to take her to himself.

The most profound silence prevailed. The ticking of the watch, which the physician held in his hand, was since heard.

His attention was riveted as well upon the child's face as upon her pulse.

Occasionally he would remove his hand from her wrist, and place it upon her brow, leave it there, and take it away again, with something like an expression of disappointment upon his face. He would then place it upon her heart, and press it gently; and, after a minute or two, return it to her wrist—it seemed almost with an aspect of renewed hope.

Now and then he moistened her lips with a grape, or bathed her scorched brow with a sponge, moistened with vinegar and water; but still she remained perfectly motionless.

At an unexpected moment she moaned, and then heaved a gentle sigh.

At the same time she opened her eyes, and, moving them, gazed slowly round her, as if she knew not where she was.

"Whichever of you ladies know the poor little creature the best, turn your face to her," hastily exclaimed the Doctor, in a whisper.

Susan Atten instantly raised her face from the coverlet, and laid it gently near to Floret's.

As soon as the faint eyes of the child rested upon it, she smiled sweetly, and in a low, feeble voice, scarcely audible, murmured:

"Mamma Atten! dear, dear Mamma Atten!"

"She is saved!" ejaculated the physician, in a low, impressive tone.

The Countess rose up, and, turning her face

away, buried it in her handkerchief. Lady Adela audibly, between her sobs, returned thanks to Heaven.

Poor, weak, worn-out Susan Atten fainted away.

## CHAPTER V.

"O blind world! O blind intention  
How oft falle at the effect is contrair." —CHAUCER.

"For men shall not so nere of counsel been  
With womanhede, ne knowen of her guise,  
Ne what they thinke, ne of their wit thengine;  
I me report to Salomon the wise,  
And mighty Sampson, which beguiled thrice  
With Dalida was; he wot that in a throve,  
There may no man statute of women knowe,"  
—THE COURT OF LOVE.

Yes! Floret was saved!

The fire, which had raged with impetuous fury, had burned itself out, leaving the little delicate frame refined and purified, as virgin gold after it has been freed from its earthly dross by the fiercest heat.

It had been slow in its approaches, and the signs it gave of having established itself in her system were misinterpreted by both Susan and Hatty as harbingers of that most insidious and fatal of all diseases to which the human frame is subject—consumption!

The fever left her strengthless, powerless, and wasted to a shadow; but, as the physician said, the renewal of her powers resolved itself into a question of pure soft air and sunny skies.

He prognosticated that, with the help of those charming essentials to health, she would soon be stronger and in better condition than, perhaps, she had ever been.

The Countess readily undertook to provide her with a country home, and made an offer to Susan Atten to allow her a comfortable income if she would give up her occupation as a dressmaker, and take charge of Floret. To this proposition Susan readily consented, and arrangements were soon made and completed.

At the expiration of a fortnight, Floret, though still feeble, was pronounced strong enough to be moved. Temporary apartments had been taken for her in the suburbs of the town of Reigate, and thither Susan departed with her. Hatty accompanied her, having decided to give her pupils a rest, and take a little holiday herself.

She had not much fear of losing her connection. She had not to learn that no other person could give the lessons she did at a cheaper figure.

The Countess of Brackleigh had—certainly under the suggestion of, and with the sanction of the physician—selected Reigate as the place best calculated to rapidly restore Floret to health; but she had also selected it because of her intended visit to Brighton, to obtain the certificate of marriage between Bertram and Constance Plantagenet. She was not certain but that she might have some difficulty in obtaining the certificate, that it might involve some time; and as she did not think it would be prudent to remain in Brighton alone, and

she did not wish to return to London after every visit, she conceived the idea of sojourning at Reigate in secret with Floret, until she had secured the document which, while it gave to her an enormous power over Bertram, would some day serve to restore the Poor Girl to her proper position.

It would, perhaps, however, be hard to say what were her actual intentions. In fact, she had not laid down any real plan to pursue after she had obtained the certificate of Bertram's marriage to Constance. Badly as he had behaved to her, she, woman-like, did not wish to part with Bertram. She was anxious to have him completely in thrall, but not to surrender him altogether. But she had a predominant wish to be revenged upon the Marchioness of Westchester. The hate with which she regarded her was intense, and she was bent upon her downfall, even if it involved the destruction of her own happiness. Under any circumstances, she did not intend to hesitate or to falter in her progress, until she had secured the desired certificate; and when that was safely in her possession, she foresaw that she would have to be guided in her future proceedings, in a great degree, by the direction events might take.

The cottage in which Floret found a new home was situated on the road leading from Reigate to Dorking. Not far from it was a picturesque, heath-covered, sandy moor, on which stood a mill, and the scenery around it was of the most picturesque description. A few days only passed there had a magical effect upon Floret. She gained strength and appetite hourly and at the expiration of a week, she could walk a mile more without fatigue. The restorative qualities and invigorating properties of that charming locality to fever-stricken invalids are, indeed, something extraordinary; but no one ever had more occasion to be grateful for the benefits than Floret.

She recovered her spirits with her strength, and soon grew as lively and joyous as she had, before her illness, been dull and listless. She hankered for the fresh air, and was scarcely contented unless out in it, and breathing in it; but in the evenings, when a little tired by her day's exertions, she would ply her needle under instructions from Susan, or devote herself to writing, under the able tuition of Hatty Marr.

During this brief interval, the Countess of Brackleigh lingered in London, hoping to receive some communication from Bertram, informing her, at least, where he was staying; but none came, and she wept bitterly in secret. His unfeeling conduct, however, only hardened her resolution, and made her loathing of the cause of her wrong increase in bitterness. Instead of abandoning her project, therefore, as she might have been, perhaps, induced to do, had the Earl been kind and commoosly attentive to her, she determined to waste no more time, but to execute it.

She preserved her usual manner before the

servants, and took the absence of the Earl their master, as a matter of course, the result of no division of feeling between them, but simply as a proceeding which had its proper inducements, and was perfectly *en regle*.

She did not deceive one of them, although she hoped she did; and she at length departed from London, too. This time, however, following the example which her lord had given her, without dropping a hint whither she was going.

She proceeded direct to Brighton, attended only by her maid, Subtle, and, leaving her to amuse herself upon the beach, in front of the Esplanade, she proceeded on to Hove alone.

As soon as she could see a disengaged carriage, she hired it, and, after making some inquiries of the flyman, she proceeded at once to the residence of the Clerk of St. Mary's Church, and having, fortunately, found him at home, she requested him to accompany her to the church, in order that he might give her a copy of a certificate of marriage which she required.

The request, though not common to a painfully lucrative extent, was still not altogether an unusual one; but the style of the lady who made it was such as to command his attention. Like the Marchioness of Westchester, she was thickly veiled; but the elegance of her dress, the magnificence of her jewelry, and the exquisitely fragrant perfume that pervaded the atmosphere whenever she moved, convinced him that he had another "tip-top lady" for a customer, and visions of sovereign number two, in lieu of a shilling, danced before his joyous eyes.

He ushered the lady over the same ground which the Marchioness of Westchester had trodden, bent upon the same errand as herself, but a short time before. She entered the little vestry, and, as the obsequious clerk questioned her respecting the date of the year of the marriage of which she required the copy of a certificate, it is doubtful whether the heart of the Marchioness, at a similar moment, beat with greater violence than did hers.

She consulted a slip of paper, which she held in her hand, and named the year 1832.

In a moment, the volume of that year was placed before her.

"Our charge for examining the book is one shilling per vol.," observed the Clerk, leaning for a moment upon it, with folded arms, and gazing up at her veil, as if with the intention of scrutinizing her features.

She shrunk, with a slight movement, backward.

"And our charge for a copy of a certificate," he continued, "is—"

She placed in his hands a sovereign, and he dispatched it to the depths of his pocket.

"Did you wish a—," he remarked, with a bland smile, and hesitated.

"I wish to examine the book myself," she interposed, a little hurriedly.

"Certainly," he rejoined, laying it open before her. "If you should wish a—"



"I will call your attention to what I require, when I have discovered the entry of which I am in search," she interrupted, in a low tone.

"Very good, Madam," he exclaimed, overlapping his hands rapidly; and the change—

"I shall not require it," she returned, hastily: "I hate to be burdened with silver."

He bowed, and mentally congratulated himself on not being afflicted with such a weakness. He reflected, at the same moment, that silver was a burden which was seldom imposed upon him, and he thought that he should not groan under it, if it were.

"I shall be within hearing, if you will do me the honor to call me, when you require my assistance," he remarked, as, with a bow, he glided into the church to rout up the pew-opener, who, as usual, was not there, and, as he constantly declared, never was, when he wanted her—which, perhaps, was oftener than he was entitled to expect.

The Countess, as soon as he had departed, produced the card which she had intercepted on its way from Nat to Bertram. She referred to the opposite side to that on which he had printed the names of the principals and the witnesses of the marriage between Constance and Bertram, and there saw some memoranda, which, though in pencil, she intuitively felt related to the entry in the register-book. They were as follows:

"Page 134. December 5th, 1832. No. 107."

She, after examining these numbers and dates with attention, turned over the leaves for page 134.

She arrived at page 133. The last marriage register upon it was marked "No. 106."

She paused, and felt dizzy for a moment; but, nerving herself to her task, she turned over the leaf, the entry upon which, when made known to the world, was to blight her fame and position for ever.

Shivering, shuddering, cold as a stone, she placed her trembling fingers upon the marriage there recorded, and fastened her dim eyes upon the written names.

She started, with a cry of amazement—they were not those she sought. She ran her eye eagerly down the page. There was not one name which she recognized; she referred to the preceding page—to the subsequent page—but with the same disappointing result. She examined the card again, the page noted down was certainly 134, and the number of the marriage 107. She returned to the book, and found that she had been examining page 135. She went back to the preceding page—it was numbered 133. The marriage registered upon it was 106. She turned over the leaf, the marriage on the page was numbered 103.

The leaf which contained the register of Bertram's marriage with Constance was gone.

She examined the centre of the book where it was stitched, and the mystery was explained.

She discovered that the leaf had been sharply and cleanly cut out at the centre, and extracted.

Overcome by the disappointment, she bowed her face on the book, and a passionate burst of tears gushed from her eyes.

She was, she believed, defeated, and Constance had triumphed. Reflection, however, came to her aid, and re-assured her the triumph could be only for a time. She had yet in her power the child, whom she was sure was the offspring of the secret marriage, the record of which she was searching for, and she determined to endeavor to find out, with the aid of Nat Ferret, who she considered was in her power, the witnesses. Her labors would be increased, she perceived, but she resolved to overcome the difficulty by energy and determination.

She removed the traces of her tears, and called the Clerk. He approached her, rubbing his hands. She gazed at him with a stern aspect, and pointed to the book.

"I wish to consult page 134," she said. "I cannot find it."

"That is a small difficulty very soon got over, Madam," he returned, rather awed by her haughty manner.

"I hope so," she rejoined.

"No doubt of it," he responded. "Here you will perceive we have page 134, and marriage No. 106. The marriages, you will understand, Madam, are numbered as well as the pages, so that, in the event of an error occurring in paging the book, or in numbering the marriage, it can be soon set right. Now, here you see there is a palpable mistake in the paging of 133 and 135; but we overcome that stupid mistake by the number of the marriage. Thus, here we have No. 106, and here," he paused, "and here—and here—No. 108. Good Heaven! the leaf has been cut out!" he cried, with chattering teeth, as he ran his finger up the centre of the volume, and felt the sharp edge of the other half of the sheet of paper, to which page 134 had been attached. "Felony—felony!" he muttered, with shaking knees.

The Countess looked at him fixedly. It was a question which instantly presented itself to her mind, whether the man had not been a party to the abstraction, and had received a heavy bribe for his complicity.

"Tell me," she said, in slow but marked tones, "whether you can remember any other person than myself requesting to see the entry of the marriage at page 134?"

"Remember," he ejaculated, in a lachrymose tone; "remember—how should I remember, when people are constantly coming and wanting copies of the books? Remember—"

"Do you recollect making a copy from the register of a marriage entered on page 134, recently?" interrupted the Countess, impatiently.

"Recently?" he echoed, vacantly.

"Yes; a day—a day—a week—a month—a year back?" she cried, with restless anxiety.

He clasped his hands to his forehead and said, reflectively:



"I made a copy of a register of a marriage for a lady from that volume a short time ago—"

"Tall, commanding presence, elegantly dressed?" suggested the Countess, rapidly.

"Ye—ye—yes," he replied, eagerly; "a queen of a woman."

The Countess's lip curled with a smile of triumph.

"A fresh crime," she muttered. "O, if I can but bring it home to her, I'll drag her to the tribunal of justice."

Then, addressing the Clerk, she said:

"Call to your remembrance the names of the persons of whose marriage she wished to obtain a certified copy."

"O yes, I can do that," cried the Clerk, quickly. "In fact, I have the copy here. She pointed out the names, and was to call for the copy, but she has not yet been."

"Let me see it," exclaimed the Countess, sharply, as with trembling fingers he produced from a large pocketbook a printed form filled up.

She almost snatched it from him, and with glittering eyes, perused it.

After reading the first few words, she flung it back to him.

"It is an extract from page 145," she said, in a tone of disappointment. "The names are Henry Creasy and Isabella Lane, and not what I seek. The certificate I am in search of is, I tell you, from page 134—the names, Lennox Bertram and Constance Neville—"

He clapped his hands together with a smack which rung through the aisles of the church.

"I have it now—I have it now!" he cried, excitedly. "Some time, in June last, in the early part of the month, a short, low, horse-stealing-looking fellow came to me, and wanted a certificate from the very page, 134, and containing the precise names you mention. I wrote it out for him, and he grumbled at my charge of three and sixpence, and offered to toss me whether he should pay me four shillings or nothing. O, I recollect it well now. 'Page 134, Lennox Bertram, Constance Neville,' and—"

"Did you leave him here alone for any length of time?" inquired the Countess, abruptly.

"Only for a minute or two, at most," returned the Clerk, agitatedly. "The fact is, that he tendered me a most suspicious-looking five-shilling piece—when indignantly refusing to toss with him, I withheld the copy of the certificate—and requested change. I declined to take it, but he said he had no other silver, and I ran to find the pew-opener, who happened to be out of the way at the moment, as she mostly is when I want her. I tried the piece by ringing and biting it, and believing it, at last, to be a good one, which it certainly proved to be, I returned to him hastily. I fortunately happened to have some loose silver in my waistcoat pocket, and from that I gave him his change."

"Was he touching or looking over the vol-

ume when you returned?" inquired the Countess, thoughtfully.

"No, Madam," returned the Clerk; "I found him leaning against the doorway of the vestry here, singing in a loud voice a profane song about 'Vixen and Towler, and Merry Legs and Jowler, and they were the dogs that 'ood fellow.' I reproved him, and started him off. That's the man who has cut the leaf out of the book, Madam."

"Are you sure of it?" she asked, quietly and earnestly.

"As sure as I can be of anything in the world," he replied, quickly. "He looked like a thief, and no doubt he had some villainous motive for extracting that register. He has been bribed to do it—bribed, Madam, by some influential parties, you may be sure of that."

"What makes you think so?" she inquired, eyeing him with a penetrating glance.

"What, Madam, let me ask you, would such a low-looking thief want with the actual certificate of the marriage of two persons who could not be any connections of his?" returned the Clerk, with nervous agitation; "no—no, there's mystery in it, property in it; but, fortunately, I know where to lay my hand upon him."

The Countess started, and glanced at him with eager surprise. She was astonished, because she recognized Nat Ferret by the Clerk's description; and as she knew that he had accompanied the Earl when he left London, and she did not know whither he had gone, she marveled how the Clerk should.

"You know where to lay your hand upon him?" she echoed.

"Yes, Madam," he replied, nodding, his head expressively; "I saw him yesterday."

"You did?" she ejaculated, amazed.

"Yes, Madam, I did," replied the Clerk, copying her emphasis on the pronoun; "and before he's many hours older, I'll set our chief officer, Solomon, on him."

"Stay," interposed the Countess, "one moment, if you please. You say that you saw the person whom you suspect of having purloined the leaf out of yonder book, yesterday?"

"I do, Madam, and I can prove it," returned the Clerk.

"Where?" she asked, quickly.

"Just before you came to the Battery, in the King's Road," was the reply.

"How was he attired?" she asked.

"As a sharp, smart groom; he was dressed in a dark gray suit," replied the Clerk. "He was so altered for the better, I scarcely knew him; but it was the same man. I'll swear to him."

"Was he alone?" inquired the Countess, with eagerness.

"He was mounted upon a beautiful bay horse, following his master, who was on a short distance in front of him."

"Describe his master to me!" exclaimed the Countess, in an authoritative, almost a fierce tone.



The man was startled by her sudden vehemence.

"I did not take much notice of him, Madam," he answered; "but I should say he was an officer in the army, or a nobleman—perhaps both. He had a very handsome face, with a dark mustache, and sat his horse like an Earl."

The Countess pressed her hand for a moment over her eyes.

So the Earl was in Brighton; perhaps had divined her purpose, and had anticipated it by the aid of Nat.

A cold, death-like feeling stole over her as she saw that, if her surmise were true, how utterly she was in his power to wear as a wife so long as it suited him to do so, and to cast off as worthless when the moment arrived which would enable to do so with impunity.

Men may, in some degree, be able to sympathize with her unhappy condition; but it is woman, and woman only, who can realize what she suffered while these thoughts were passing through her mind.

The Clerk rambled on with a mixture of menaces and lamentations, while her brain was distracted by the thoughts which thronged and raced through it. She at first heeded him not, but the necessity for self-exertion and command pressed itself upon her consideration; and in the midst of a wild denunciation of Nat, which rolled like soft thunder from the lips of the Clerk, followed by a somewhat watery declaration that he would not rest until he hanged him, she raised her hand and stilled the torrent.

She produced a purse, and pulled out several pieces of gold, which, being new from the mint, had a very attractive glitter. They sparkled, and so did the eyes of the Clerk.

"Listen to me, if you please," observed the Countess, with a subdued but peculiarly impressive tone and manner. "I am the person most deeply wronged by the abstraction of that register of marriage. It inflicts upon me a lasting injury, or its destruction may prove of the greatest benefit to me. Under either phase, I alone am likely to make an outcry about this wicked robbery. At present it is of the utmost importance to me that it should be kept secret."

She placed several gold pieces in his apparently most reluctantly proffered hand, and said:

"Do not imagine for an instant that I would insult you by attempting to bribe you. I ask only of you as a favor to keep this matter a secret until I bid you speak. It will not be discovered if you are silent, for there is only one marriage entered upon that leaf, and you will receive no further applications for a copy of that certificate. I am sure of that. I, too, know the man who has stolen it, and I can recover it where you would fail. I see clearly, if you do not, that you would be able to establish against him at most a suspicion of guilt; for, no doubt, other persons have had access to the same book between his application and your discovery of the abstraction."

"They have," groaned the Clerk, slipping the gold pieces into his gaping and not unwilling pocket.

"Therefore, let matters rest as they are at present," she added. "Give me your name and address, so that when occasion demands it, I may write to you."

"With pleasure, Madam," he rejoined, and produced a printed card, with full particulars of his other occupations, besides that of Clerk of the church, printed upon it.

She took it from him, and placed it in a small pocket-book.

"Remember," she said, impressively, "that you keep the secret. Do not mention to any person, if inquiry should be made of you—you will mark what I say—that I have been here; not even if an accurate description of my appearance be furnished to you. You will not forget this caution, for if you should, I shall suffer by your indiscretion, as I have done, and I may punish you instead of rewarding you."

Without another word, she hurried from the church, leaving him alone, aghast, and utterly overwhelmed.

She entered the open carriage which she had hired, and proceeded to search for her maid, Subtle, and on finding her near to the spot where she had left her, she bade her take her seat in the carriage with her. She then bade the driver convey them up and down the King's Road, facing the sea, until she gave him fresh orders.

The afternoon was very beautiful, and the King's Road was, as it usually is, thronged with equestrians and carriages, though in that day the *mis en scène* was of a somewhat different character to what is to be seen at the same place now.

The Countess, with her thick veil over her face, leaned back in her carriage, although she scanned eagerly every face that passed.

For some time, she remained without making a single movement, reclining as still and motionless as if she were carved out of stone.

Suddenly she sat upright, threw back her veil, and leaning forward, bowed low and formally to a gentleman who was advancing toward her on horseback.

He raised his hat, and the next instant his placid, smiling features underwent an extraordinary change.

It was the Earl of Brackleigh, and suddenly, to his overwhelming amazement, he recognized the features of the Countess.

A thought flashed through his mind that she might have discovered something respecting his previous marriage, he knew not what, and that she had, perhaps, been to Hove Church to search the books. At this instant, a child's toy-hoop rolled from the pavement beneath his horse's feet.

The animal, which had been curveting and prancing, now plunged affrightedly, reared and bolted.

The Countess gave one agitated glance after him, saw Nat sweep past her carriage in full



chase, and a dozen other equestrians also. She compressed her lips; her first impulse was, to remain and learn what consequence might follow from the Earl's horse having taken fright; but, after a moment's anxious wavering, she bade her coachman drive as quickly as he could to the railway station.

She proceeded with her maid, Subtle, to Red Hill, by the train, but some two or three hours elapsed before she could obtain a vehicle to convey her to Reigate—a distance of some four miles.

At length, after sundown, a carriage made its appearance, and entering it, she directed the driver to convey her to the cottage in which Floret had been placed.

As they neared it, the way being extremely dark, the coachman very nearly drove over a woman. He shouted at her, and she screamed. An old man roughly dragged the woman from beneath the horse's feet, and the Countess heard him say, in a husky voice:

"Jamaiker 'll be the death on you some day, Dianner. You'll go afore your time, as many a calf does, an' vot flowvers d'ye think 'll bloom over your grave—rum-buds, Dianner, rum-buds, an' nothen puttler!"

"All-rite-ol-man-of-all!" muttered a thick voice, incoherently.

The coachman drove on, and in two or three minutes more the Countess alighted at the cottage in which Floret lay buried in a profound and happy slumber.

## CHAPTER VI.

"The panic spread.

'Twas but that instant she had left \* \* \*

Laughing and looking back \* \* \*

But now, alas! she was not to be found;

Nor from that hour could anything be guess'd

But that she was not." —ROXES.

The Countess of Brackleigh remained at the cottage at Reigate until the middle of the following day.

She believed that she knew the worst of her position now, and that she had a clear conception of the course which she ought to pursue.

She had no doubt that, in the eye of the law, she was no wife, but she saw that if she could secure possession of that certificate of marriage of which she had been in search, and destroy it, no person could actually disprove the validity of her marriage with Bertram, because the documentary proofs of a former marriage could not be forthcoming, not being in existence.

That is to say, that neither she nor the Marchioness of Westchester, nor Bertram himself, were aware that a transcript of the registers of marriages throughout the United Kingdom for many years back had been made, under a comparatively-recent Act of Parliament, and that this transcript was deposited at Somerset House.

They all believed that, with the destruction of the original certificate, all proof of the marriage was at an end; and they acted in accordance with this idea.

The Countess resolved to remain the Count-

ess of Brackleigh until all prospect of happiness with her pseudo husband had ceased. When all hope forsook her, then she resolved to lay her case before her father, and be guided and governed by his counsel.

In the interim, she had no intention of permitting the Marchioness of Westchester to live on in scornful disregard of her wrong, or her own guilt; but the details of her intent to keep her in a continual state of apprehension she reserved for future consideration.

She had, however, one settled idea, and that was the possibility of making poor little Floret the great instrument of her revenge. Alas! wrapped up in the contemplation of her own inexcusable injury, absorbed by the idea of some ample and complete avengement, she forgot that the child had sensibilities and susceptibilities, a strong development of a natural pride, and a very acute sense of humiliation, scorn, and degradation. It did not suggest itself to her that the success of her designs might result in the destruction of that innocent girl's happiness—probably in a crushed, bruised, abraded spirit, and a broken heart.

No; she felt that she had been herself grievously abused, and she thought only of exacting atonement by such means as were in her power. Like most persons mistakenly moved by the spirit of revenge, she did not reflect that, in the attempt to avenge an injury, she would, in all probability, inflict one.

She passed an hour or two in earnest conversation with Susan Atten. She gave her general directions respecting the custody, training, and management of Floret. She presented her with an order upon her bankers, to draw quarterly a sum for the comfortable maintenance of both, and for a "decent" education for Floret, and she further gave to her a token, in the form of a diamond hoop for the finger—the first present Bertram had made her—by which she could gain access to her at any time, if she happened to be accessible, and she communicated to her a cipher, in which she was to write to her, should a personal interview not be possible.

Having done this, she returned to London, and found the Earl of Brackleigh there before her.

He had escaped from all injury when his horse took fright, owing to Nat having successfully stopped the affrighted animal before it had time to do injury to itself or its master.

He sought an interview with her immediately after her arrival. He did not pause to make any preliminary observations, nor await any demand of an explanation of his conduct from her; but he burst into a torrent of invective, with which was mingled a series of charges, slanders, taunts, and insults, such as would have driven some women insane.

The Countess retained her self-possession to the last, listened to him calmly, and, when he paused to take breath, she said, with a cold equanimity that perfectly staggered him:

"Bertram, I know my position and yours. The chief of what you have dared to utter I



meet with unqualified scorn. You know what you have asserted to be false, or you are more of a natural fool than a knave. Whatever may be the influence by which your present conduct is instigated, I despise it. I know much of your past history—more than you conceive. I shall yet know more. I wish I was in utter ignorance of every particle of it, and had never known, seen, heard of you. But I cannot change the decrees of fate; nor can you. I must accept my unhappy position, and make the best of it. I shall do that—I bide my time; it will come. I have faith in that. Until that hour, or at least for some time yet to come, let me counsel you to preserve a seeming amity with me. It will be your wisest course. You have nothing to gain by quarreling with me, but much to lose. Your conscience will—it should—tell you that. I ask of you one thing only. Question me not. I will not you. I shall not need!"

She ceased. He was struck deeply by the peculiar character of her observations. A busy conscience caused him to interpret her meaning, and to interpret it correctly. He reflected, and, much as he was stung by her contemptuous manner of alluding to him, he saw quickly that it would be his most discreet course to preserve a seeming friendship with her, as she intimated, for the time being.

There was, however, one subject rankling in his mind; one which had, during his absence from London, kept him on the rack; one which was trembling on his lips, and had been from the first moment of the present interview; one which had, indeed, been the inciting cause of his addressing Lady Brackleigh with such violent excitement, and had urged him to make suggestions, and to give expression to insults, of which he ought to have been ashamed. Assuming a stern, haughty mien, he said:

"I have no objection, upon reflection, Lady Brackleigh, to accede to your proposition, that outwardly we should appear as friends. It will be better for both that neither our servants, nor the world, should make us the subject of slanderous talk. Before I consent, however, to the arrangement, there is a question which I intend to put to you, and it is one upon which I must be satisfied."

He paused for a moment.

"Proceed," she observed, as he hesitated; "I am prepared to receive it, and to answer it, if necessary."

"It—it—a—it has—a—" he returned, in a slightly stammering, confused tone; "it has a—reference to that person—that creature—that child—to which your ladyship has thought—a—proper to take such a violent fancy and adopt."

"What of that child?" she asked, fixing upon him a searching glance.

"It is this," he rejoined, trying to speak in an authoritative, dictatorial tone. "It will be of no use to attempt to conceal the truth from me, or to disguise facts. I ask you, and I expect a truthful answer from you. Whose child is it you have taken under your charge?"

"Whose child?" she echoed, with amazement, as if she expected that he, at least, would not have asked that question of her.

"Ay!" he responded, knitting his brow, and bending a savage look upon her.

Lowering his tone, he added:

"Is it yours, Lady Brackleigh?"

A crimson flush passed over her face, and left her whiter than the hue of death itself. For a moment she was fearfully agitated, her eyes were suffused with burning tears, and her bosom heaved and fell, and her throat swelled as though it would suffocate her.

He saw with burning eyes the spasm which passed over her frame, and with an emotion, scarcely less powerful than her own, he muttered:

"Guilty, by all the fiends of hell!—guilty!"

She at length conquered the bitter feelings which his words had occasioned, and she said to him, in slow emphatic tones, which, however, betrayed a slight degree of nervous tremor

"Your question is a brutal one, and as unjust as brutal. It was wrongly addressed to me. You have seen the child, Lord Brackleigh—it bears a face, the counterpart of one well known to you. You should have put the question to yourself."

As she uttered these words, almost hastily, perhaps, to conceal the emotion which his unjust insult had aroused, she turned upon him a glance, which seemed to pierce him through, for he shrunk beneath it, and she quitted the room.

There was something startlingly suggestive in her observation. The significance of her look and tone assured him that she had a direct and positive meaning in what she said, although he failed to interpret it correctly.

He paced the chamber in deep and anxious thought. He had seen, she asserted, the child, and it bore a face the counterpart of one known to him!

Where had he seen the child? Whose face did it resemble?

Remembrances at times present themselves with swift abruptness, particularly when unbidden. He, however, summoned them now, and the one he sought for came, but not to increase his ease.

He suddenly remembered the child to which the Countess had drawn his attention at Ascot Races. He recollected that she had pointed out to him a resemblance which it bore to the Marchioness of Westchester. He had for the moment, then, been startled, but now he was staggered.

He had dismissed, as preposterous, the thought that the resemblance between the beggar-child and Constance was other than accidental. The fact that Lady Brackleigh had obtained possession of it, and, with some purpose in contemplation, had adopted it, made him at once conceive that there was more in that resemblance than he supposed. With a new and fiercely-exciting idea, burning like a meteor-flame in his brain, he determin-



ed upon having an interview with the child, and questioning it respecting its origin.

He had a most unpleasant impression, that the Countess, by some means or another, of which he could form no idea, had discovered, or was near the discovery of the secret, which had haunted him like a fearful dusky phantom ever since he had married her. But surely, if she was on the verge of ascertaining that his legitimate wife had given birth to a legitimate child, he ought to be acquainted with the fact as soon as she.

He hurried to his room, and engaged Nat's services to make inquiries respecting the child, and to find out how he could obtain access to her, without the Countess becoming aware of the fact.

Nat went about his work in his usual sneaking, lurching way, but he encountered the greatest difficulty in gathering any information respecting the child. His once friendly "sprig of lawender" was no longer friendly, and he made no way with the women-folk; they did not like his look. Yet he contrived to ascertain that the child had recovered from her illness, and had departed from the mansion, not one of the household knew whether.

He contrived, too, sorely against his inclination, to have a stormy interview with the Countess, who, with a startling suddenness, pounced upon him when alone in an obscure part of the house, where he had no business to be, and whither she had followed him unobserved, until it pleased her to make her presence known to him.

She terrified him out of his senses—and the copy of the certificate which he had obtained at Brighton. She charged him with having extracted and destroyed the original register, and she threatened at once to denounce him, give him into the custody of the police, and cause him to be transported for life, if he did not surrender the stolen leaf, as well as the copy, to her.

Nat vowed and protested, with every asseveration short of foul language, that he had not touched the book; that he had asked only for a copy of a certificate, and that he had obtained it by paying a large price for it. He swore with an oath which extorted a short scream from the Countess, that he spoke the truth, and that was all he knew about it.

Truth may be simulated, but when it is absolutely spoken, unaccompanied by any equivocation, it carries its own confirmation with it to every but a perverted mind.

Nat spoke the truth, and did so so earnestly, and in such abject terror, that the Countess could not but believe him.

So she contented herself by taking from him the copy of the certificate which he so prized, and which he inwardly promised himself to steal from her the first opportunity which offered itself; by making him promise to faithfully reveal to herself the Earl's movements, together with the instructions he had received from him, and all that happened in consequence thereof; and by menacing him with

every imaginable evil if he endeavored to emancipate himself from her thralldom, or disclose to any person living, to say nothing of the Earl of Brackleigh, that he was employed by her, or that she ever knew of his existence, save as a groom to the Earl.

That done, she waited to see the course which the Earl would pursue.

She was not long kept in suspense.

Bertram, on learning that the child, whom he wished as anxiously now to see as he had been to avoid, had been removed in secrecy from the mansion, it was not known where, determined to accomplish, at every hazard, an interview with the Marchioness of Westchester, and at that interview to challenge her with the existence of a child—the result of their marriage. He resolved to extort from her, whatever might be the risk, the truth or falsity of the surmise, and to endeavor to bring to a close the wretched condition of affairs in which he dragged on a discontented, unhappy life.

To his surprise and mortification, Nat, whom he had set to dog her movements, brought him word that the Marquis and Marchioness of Westchester had, a few days previously, quitted England for a lengthened stay; but he was unable to ascertain whither they had gone. But very few servants were left at the mansion, and they either could not or would not answer the questions he put to them.

The Earl engaged the services of a detective officer, and in two days the man informed him that the Marquis and the Marchioness had proceeded by the South Eastern Railway to Folkestone, *en route* to Paris.

The Earl promptly made up his mind to follow them. He met the Countess that day at dinner, treated her politely, and took an opportunity of informing her, during the dinner, that his health was wretchedly broken, and that he required some decided change of air; that he thought of going immediately to Sweden, or up the Nile, or St. Petersburg, or Holland, perhaps to Niagara Falls, he had not quite made up his mind whither; but to one place or other he felt that he must go, and that without a day's loss of time.

The Countess remarked that he did look as though he was sinking under the pressure of an overburdened mind, and that a change would be beneficial to him. She quite agreed that it would. She also assured him that, whether he journeyed to any of the places which he had named, whether he went to Holland or the Island of Madeira, to Labrador or to the Somali Land, to Greenland or to China, that it was her duty, as a wife, to accompany him. She desired to make no allusion to her own broken health, but if it were a question to interfere with her intention to accompany him, she would waive that—everything. Go she would, and any and every argument he might attempt to advance would fail to move her from her resolution. Indeed, she begged him to consider that he had exhausted every possible argument, and had failed to alter her determination.



"Witherseever thou goest, thither I will go too," she concluded, in a firm, determined tone. "And if I may be permitted to suggest, I propose that we go to Italy. We shall there meet some of the English peerage, who have already gone thither. Say, shall we go to Italy?"

He glared at her savagely, and set his teeth together. He struck the table slightly, but sharply, with his knuckles, and said, with a peculiar tinge of ferocity in his tone:

"You shall have your way, Lady Brackleigh. We will go to Italy."

At the expiration of two days, they quitted London for Paris, Nat only accompanying his lordship, and the maid Subtle the Countess.

While they were spending their way to the gay capital of France, Floret was gathering health and strength at Reigate, and gathering it, too, with a kind of marvelous rapidity. She promised to be stronger, healthier, and sprightlier than she had ever been in her life before.

Every day she accompanied Susan and Hatty in long walks, made mostly in the vicinity of Red Hill; for, twice or thrice, Susan had observed gipsies moving stealthily about on the undulating furze crested moor which skirted the Dorking road. They rambled over the beautiful and picturesque common at Earlswood, charmed with the prospect, in love with the wild flowers which grow there luxuriously in the light sandy soil, and amusing themselves by gathering the many-hued sands, which are to be found in the whole neighborhood, with the purpose of forming them, by means of glass receptacles, into humble but pretty ornaments for the table or chimney-piece.

At times they ascended the steep hill above Reigate, crossed the frail suspension bridge, and then, wandering through the leafy, sinuous plantation beyond, sparking and spangled with myriads of buds and blossoms, they emerged upon one of the finest views in the world.

Hatty, who was something of a botanist, and a very fair geographer, improved the occasion by expanding Floret's mind. She gave to her the names of the trees by which they were surrounded, and most of the plants and flowers; explained the structure, and gave her an idea of their classification. She also pointed out the various counties which are to be seen from the chain of hills, upon one of which they stood, and made it serve as the subject of a lecture, which deeply interested Floret, who gazed upon the magnificent panorama spread before her, and listened with avidity to every word that fell from Hatty lips.

One evening, just after they had taken their tea, they were tempted by the cloudless sky and the balmy breeze, which blew softly and sweetly, fragrance laden, in at their open window, to take a stroll, as on that day they had not been beyond the town.

They proceeded to the park, passed the seat of Lord Somers, and following a romantic

winding path, gained, by a gradual ascent, the top of a hill which commands a charming prospect, and here they seated themselves to enjoy it.

Floret, however, soon busied herself in gathering wild flowers among the undergrowth which prevails here, and at the foot of many a tall and fine tree which for centuries has shaded the spot on which it stands.

Hatty and Susan were soon engaged in conversation, for the state of the exchequer of the latter informed her that she must return to London, and take up her harassing occupation in order to obtain the few shillings upon which she was forced to exist. She was occupied in arranging a future correspondence between herself and Susan, and she promised promptly to forward to the latter any letter which might arrive from Canada addressed to her.

How long they had been thus engaged they did not know; but they rose up, for the rapidly-declining sun admonished them to make their way back to their cottage.

They looked for Floret, but she was not visible.

They called to her, but she did not answer.

They ran to and fro in search of her, but were unable to find her.

At first they both thought she was playing at hide-and-seek with them, and Susan cried out loudly to her, entreating her to appear, and not to terrify them; but there was no response, save a species of mocking echo of her own voice.

Hatty screamed loudly, for she grew frightened. Susan shrieked, too, for an instinctive presentiment of evil seized upon her.

They both ran wildly to and fro, hunting breathlessly among the gorse bushes, in the hollows, in every place where she could hide, be secreted, or have fallen, but in vain, for there was no trace of her.

Hatty, at her own suggestion, ran toward the town for assistance, while Susan distractedly continued her search.

Men returned with Hatty, men who were well acquainted with every foot of ground, and they aided in the search. They kept it up until dawn, going over a circuit of many miles, but without success.

Susan, exhausted and delirious, was conveyed, by the directions of Hatty, who was herself in a fainting condition, to the cottage which they had quitted the evening before with such placid contentment, and there laid upon a bed from which it was long ere she arose.

Hatty, however, remained with her, and regardless of her own future, played the part of a true and disinterested friend, until Susan recovered health and strength enough to move about and act for herself.

Floret, who was the cause of all this sorrow and sickness, was deeply engaged in collecting flowers and arranging them into a beautiful bouquet, with a skill and aptness which showed that she had lost none of the art which



she had been compelled to exercise from almost infancy.

"It is not so pretty a nosegay as I could wish," she murmured to herself, as she sat under a huge cluster of underwood, which was adorned at its roots with many simple and beautiful flowers. "But yet, if Victor were here, I would give it to him, and tell him that I would have made it much prettier if I could. Victor is such a pretty name: V I C T O R —Victor, Lord Victor; how grand and beautiful it sounds. Ah! I am now sure he did not mean to scorn me when he gave me that money. I am sure that he did not—and when I see him again, I shall say to him—"

"Sixteen bunches a-pennee, sweet lavenders—sixteen bunches a-pennee," whispered a voice, close in her ear.

A terrified shriek burst from her lips, but it was suppressed by some heavy material which was flung over her, and in which she was wrapped closely. She felt herself lifted from the ground and borne away, then her senses forsook her.

When consciousness was restored to her, she found herself by a fire, in a closely-wooded plantation; two or three gipsies, with swarthy faces and glittering eyes, were lying about, close at hand, watching her. Before her, grinning like an ancient and bloated hyena, was the Grannam. A pair of arms were round her tightly, but not so as to hurt, and a voice was whispering in her ear.

It was that of Daddy Windy.

"My Vite Rose—my Vite Rose, my own Vild Vite Rose. Open its wile eyes, and say putty things to its own Daddy—its own Daddy, who's as pleased to 'ave it back again vith him as if he'd got in his 'ands twice the fortin' it's goin' to earn for 'im."

For a minute, Floret listened to his words. All the while she stared as if she was in a dream.

Then she uttered one lang, wild, quivering shriek, which pierced the brains of those who heard it, made the recumbent men spring on to their hands and knees, the Grannam to half rise up, the Daddy to mutter something very rapidly, and to place his hand over her mouth.

"Hush, my lily-bloom," he whispered, excitedly; "hush! listen to reason, vite star droy—listen to Daddy, silver blossom. There ain't no perlice near for many a mile; there ain't no nothen to heer you, accept the howl or the rooks in their nestes atop o' the tall ellums—so don't go to try an' spile your bootiful voice, vich is sweeter than the dripping o' vater in a still lake, or the moosie o' the summer breeze as chants through leaves and flowers in the woodlands, or the chink o' two new sur'rins a knockin' themselves together for joy in Daddy's pocket, acos they knows they brings delight to the 'art of a poor old cripple like Daddy. Don't be afeard, Vite Rose, ould Daddy loves 'is wite silver bell too vell—toe vell to 'arm her. No, he'd sooner cut hisself off his own stalk than 'urt an 'air o' the putty 'ead o' the flower of 'is 'eart."

But he spoke to a heedless ear. Floret when she screamed so frantically and so afrightedly, had tossed up her arms wildly, and had struggled sharply for a moment; but they now lay listlessly by her side. She had relapsed into a state of insensibility again.

The Grannam saw this, and she whispered to him:

"She is gone back into a swoon—lay her on the bed in the tent, that'll be the best thing for 'er. I'll vatch her, an' ven she comes to, most like she'll drop into a plessint sleep that will be best for all on us. Ven she wakes up, you can talk to her ag'in, old man of all, like a far-ther, an' she'll listen to reason, I'll swear, an' if she don't—"

"You von't 'ave occasion to tell me vot'll be the best thing to do," interrupted the Daddy, in a peculiarly significant tone. "Vich I shall 'ave my own vay vith the White Rose. Don't you perwoke me, Dianner, I say, don't you perwoke me. I'm werry mild by natur', but a tiger gets out o' temper sometimes. I knows vot to do vith the White Rose."

He rose up gradually as he spoke, and lifted Floret with him; he tottered to the semi-circular tent, which was pitched upon a dry spot close at hand, and laid her carefully within it.

He let the curtains drop gently before the entrance, and then toddled slowly back to the fire. Seating himself down by it, he drew out his pipe, and lighting it, commenced to smoke, while he gazed at the burning embers thoughtfully.

Suddenly, a hand was placed upon his shoulder; he raised his eyes, and beheld, bending over him, the beautiful but stern and melancholy face of Hagar Lot.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Now rent  
His brackish curls and tore his wrinkled face,  
Where tears in billows did each other chase;  
And, burst with ruth, he hurled his marble mace  
At the stern Fates

\* \* \* \* \*

O thievish Fates to let—"

—CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE.

The attitude of Daddy Windy the moment previous to the appearance of Hagar Lot was one of perfect repose and complacency. As he gazed at the sputtering, scintillant burning twigs and branches, which made a fire that looked cheerful in that dark and lonely place, he did so with the aspect of a man who, having been long engaged in pursuing some object of considerable importance to his pecuniary interests, has succeeded in accomplishing it, and gives himself up to quiet, agreeable, satisfactory, and self-gratulatory reflections.

The visions which began to float before his smiling, winking eyes, clothed in the sanguine radiance of confident hopes, were rudely dispelled by the sudden and unexpected apparition of Hagar Lot.

The sight of her made every drop of blood in the Daddy's veins hurry back to his heart.



He felt as if, having had a purse of gold in his pocket, he had just discovered its loss through an uncalculated hole in the latter.

A silent conviction stole over him that Hagar had come to claim the White Rose, and to take her from him. He mentally registered a fearful oath that she should not have her, if he could prevent her, and he thought he knew how to do that—even if he murdered her.

He looked up at her, grinned, and winked at her with both eyes.

"Vy, Hagar, my dark dahlia, is it you?—ah! ah! Who'd a thought a seein' on you jest now: I'm sure I didn't."

He rose up from his recumbent position, and extended both hands to her.

She did not touch them.

"You were thinking of me," she said, coldly.

"Lo, I am here!"

A thought of her certainly had crossed his mind while he was contemplating the future which Floret would probably make for him. It was but a momentary conceit, because it was she who had intrusted at the outset Floret to his charge. It flitted away as rapidly as it appeared, but as it went he felt the pressure of Hagar's hand upon his shoulder.

He shrugged his shoulders, and his face turned a very sickly, death-like yellow.

"Vell, I vos, my sloe-blossom," he returned, hesitatingly. "Talk of the infernal party, they ses, an' you sees von o' the family! Now, my dark pearl, I—"

"You thought of me," she interrupted, "in connection with another. You need not hesitate—I know it. It is of her I am here to speak with you."

She turned to the gipsies, and to the Grannam, and pointing to the opposite direction to that in which the tent had been erected, she said, in a commanding voice:

"Go, all of you, down the path yonder. I must have some secret talk with the Daddy. Watch, too, well, for danger to all of you menaces from that quarter."

The men obeyed readily, but the Grannam uttered a protest. She was unable to see the propriety of leaving a snug fireside for a cold and damp position, in a gloomy spot.

Hagar, however, introduced her to the necessity of obeying.

"Go!" she exclaimed, stamping her foot. "Go!" she repeated, and placing her face near to the Grannam's, she said, in a low, stern tone: "Obey me, or you may not approve of the flavor of your drink when next you taste it."

The Grannam shuddered and rolled away with as quick a step as she could manage.

"Hagar's a norful woman," she soliloquized; "I allus said so."

When they were left alone, Hagar turned to the Daddy, and said:

"You guess—you know why I am here?"

The Daddy ran his fingers through his shiny, grizzly locks, and muttered:

"It ain't to refresh your eyesight with a

look at my pacter, I s'pose; nor it ain't to pay me the trifle as you promised me ven I first took the Vite Rose under my perental ving; nor it ain't to tell my fortin' by the stars, if I vos to cross your palm with a silver piece. No, my pupple night-bloom, it ain't no use my gussing. I did not know that I should be 'ere in this salocbrous plantation a readin' the stars this blessed night, so I couldn't werry vell expect the pleasure o' seein' your 'ansom countynouse 'ere, an', o' course, I don't pretend to know vy you are 'ere, or vot you are 'ere for."

"I will tell you," she rejoined, emphatically. "The White Rose."

He turned his face rather sharply to her, and put his hands behind his back.

"O yes," he exclaimed, speaking quickly, "ve all on us come out for suthen, an' some on us come out rayther strong. You've come out for the Vite Rose, Hagar, 'ave you?"

"I have. I shall take her away with me tonight," returned she, with a firm, resolute tone.

"Yes," he replied with a savage grin; "yes, a 'ooman is mighty fond of her own vay. You 'ave come out rayther strong, Hagar—rayther strong; I must say; but I'm afraid you vill go agen with a weaker crest than you left 'ome with. Don't you know the Vite Rose was stole away from me, Hagar, last Arscot Cup day?"

"I do, and I know who took her from you. I was at your side when it occurred, though you saw me not," she rejoined. "Since your release from prison, you have not moved a step without my knowledge. I know that you have been tracking the White Rose to her parterre; I know that you this evening seized her while she was gathering some flowers. You have brought her here. She is in yonder tent."

"Very vell, blooming nightshade," he responded, slowly, with trembling jaws; "very vell, I've 'eered many vider guesses at facts than those 'ere. But, suppose all you hev said is werry true, vot then, Hagar, my ivy plant, vot then?"

"I am here to claim her," she responded, in decided tones.

"Vich I don't dispute, my Star-o'-the-night," he rejoined. "I know'd a man vonce, who gev a small an' rayther putty-looking pup to another: 'There,' ses he, 'you can keep that,' ses he, 'an' bring it up as your own,' ses he. 'Some day, ven the blue moon's at the full, a party may claim it—it may be on the third Sunday in the veek, vich never comes.' Hagar, my dark-eyed passion-flower, the blue moon ain't yet in its fast kevawter; the fast Sunday in the veek has on'y just turned, and never is sich a werry long day, it ain't turned up yet. Do you understand me, Flower of the Dark Hemlock?"

She looked at him sternly, and frowned.

"That you refuse to part with the White Rose? Yes," she answered. "Have you reflected? Has the sage night-owl changed to a mouthing rook?"



"The owl is a wise thing, Hagar," he responded, quickly; "but the rook is a cunning bird, too. Vich hever you takes me to be, I can part with the Vite Rose no more—never no more." He clenched his hands, he set his teeth together. "Never no, more," he repeated.

"I placed her in your keeping for a time only," she rejoined, sternly. "You were paid to keep her for a certain period, and that has now terminated. You would have had the stipend which I promised to you paid regularly; but you, in your cunning, sought to keep out of my path—to avoid me—to make a profit out of the beauty of the White Rose, which you fancied I should expect to share, but which you resolved to keep entirely to yourself. Your wanderings, your movements were never unknown to me. I could any moment, at will, have appeared before you, and have taken her from you; but the time had not come. It has arrived now. I take her from you this night; but I bid you beware how you attempt to follow or seek again to get her into your power, as you have done a few hours back. Your connection with her, from this hour, has ceased forever."

"I don't see it," interposed the Daddy, quickly; "my eyesight ain't quite so sharp as it vos, certain'y, an' I don't see vot you've been pointin' out to me. But, Hagar, 'ooman," he added, changing his voice to a growl, "I don't part with the Vite Rose: she's the happle o' my hi—she's my best tooth—she's the last pulse o' my art—the last blood-drop in my veins—the last sigh out o' my body! I parts with her ven I parts with them, an' not before. Leastways, I do not part with her until that werry, werry large heap o' goold vich those who can pay me liberally—you remember your own vords, star o' the dark copse—puts down afore me, saying to me: 'Ve are dukes an' princesses; you are a poor old Daddy—you takes the goold an' ve the Vite Rose.' Do you understand me yet, pearl o' our tribe?"

"You have more to say," she answered, in a gloomy, determined tone. "Say all that is lurking in your mind, and then hear my last words."

"Then, Hagar, 'ooman, the star vich peeped out in the sky ven I vos brought into the world, beneath the dew-dripping leaves of briars and thorns, in the depths of a held, hold 'ood, is growin' paler an' fainter every day, an' night, an' hour. I mayn't per'aps number as many more months as I 'ave years; an' therefore, life is werry sweet to me. "I knows you 'ave a death-dealin' power; but so 'ave I, 'ooman—so 'ave I, O flowerin' henbane! an' if you say von other vord to me, on'y von other vord"—he drew a clasp-knife from his pocket, and opened it—"I vill spring like a vild cat into yonder tent, an' send the Vite Rose to the walleys o' shadders: that's I think, about all I 'ave to say, Hagar." "It is enough," she said, as he ceased, "enough to make me laugh at, and to scorn you; to—"

She paused; for a night-bird abruptly sent forth a shrill, trembling, plaintive cry.

She listened eagerly, until the sound died away, and then she proceeded—

"To wonder and marvel at you. You know that you cannot brave my power—you feel that, and tremble! The few wretched years you have to live can be but little brightened and gilded, though a mound of wealth were given you to surrender the White Rose, and they may be darkened, blighted by your obstinacy. I have told you that I claim the White Rose, and that from this moment your title to touch her even has ceased. Shut up your knife, old man. I could lay you a blackened, swollen, putrid corpse upon the turf, ere you could advance three feet toward the tent! But I am not here to do deeds of violence, or to urge you to attempt to commit a crime which would be fatal to you. I could call upon the men of our tribe, who have aided you, and who have just left this copse, to carry away the White Rose whithersoever I directed them—"

"Over my dead body!" growled the Daddy, champing his words in his excitement.

"What, then, if I willed that she should go?" rejoined Hagar. "I could summon others of the tribe, who would pin you to the ground like a mole, if you attempted to interfere with my assumption of my right to resume my custody of the White Rose; but I have other ends than to quarrel with you, old man—"

"I'm a nettle—I am," interposed the Daddy, with a savage grin; "not a budding plant, but a full-grown, prickly, stinging, blistering nettle—an' mind how you touch me!"

"Nettles are harmless, when seized with a firm grip," returned Hagar. "You might have chosen a more apt illustration. I am a poisoned thorn, which, once in your flesh, cannot be extracted, and will surely drag you to your doom, if you oppose me. Still, as I have said, I have ends to serve which will render a quarrel with you an error—a serious fault. I may hereafter need you as a witness; I would not have you play the part of unwilling one. I therefore leave you to-night to reflect over what I have said. You must surrender the White Rose to me—"

"Immedjetlee a'ter you hev tumbled me on to the turf a blackened, swollen, pootrid corpse, as you hev 'andsomely promised to do," he interrupted. "But not afore, my dark-eyed blossom—not afore?"

"Be it so," she returned, flinging her cloak over her mouth and shoulders; "further parley with you is useless."

"Werry useless, if you 'opes to parley me out o' the Vite Rose!" he exclaimed.

"You will wish, when the dawn comes, that you had consented to my demand," replied Hagar, with a strangely meaning smile. "Farewell! we shall meet when I have need of your services, not when your heart's bursting to find me."

She glided into the darkness, which covered the space a few feet beyond them, and in an instant, almost, he lost the sound of her foot-steps.

He nodded his head and winked both eyes;



he wagged his jaws with a savage grin; he looked with a ferocious leer, and then he crept stealthily to the tent.

During his colloquy with Hagar, the fire had nearly burnt itself out, and his eyes, keen as they were, were not able to penetrate the darkness beneath the tent, but he placed his hand inside and felt a motionless form—its hand and arm were warm, and so was its face.

It moved as he passed his hand over its velvet cheek, and slightly moaned.

"Ho-o-sh—ho o-sh!" he hissed between his lips; "hoosh-a-by, baby, on the 'tree-top! Hoosh, my pooty vite doe—hoosh! Sleep till dawn, chuck—sleep till dawn, an' we'll be over the 'ills an' far away, an' chase the 'ours away like butterflies in a garding full o' flowwers—hoosh!"

The child became still, and he listened anxiously to her breathing. Presently he muttered—

"It's all right; she sleeps comfortably. I shall be werry sorry ven the dawn comes, shall I? I shall vish I'd druv her away, shall I? Pardner, you didn't think that o' me, did yer? You didn't think me quite such a hold, anshent Je-roosalem as that, pardner, did yer?"

With that he chuckled, and then he whistled a lengthened, but not loud note.

It was responded to by the re-appearance of the gipsies, who had retired, and the Grannam.

The Daddy pointed to the fire, and said, in a low, but sharp tone:

"Make up that 'ere into a bright, crackling blaze, for I'm werry chilly—I'm werry cold—I've been in a snow-storm, I've. An' look'ee here, you boys—an' specially you, O, my Dianner—I'm goin' to lay down in front of the tent, verein is slumbering the Vite Rose, as 'appy as a cat in a lady's muff. In my 'and will be this ere knife, open, and ready for immediate use. It has pison on the pint—pison that kills vith no cure. Now, me and my pardner 'spects that, in the dead 'our, just afore the birds wakes up and vistles their pooty moosick, somebody will drop in 'ere on the sneak, and try to steal my Vite Rose from me; but if I am caught napping, pardner 'll 'ave von eye hopen, an', as vot he doos I doos, we'll together be the death o' that ere somebody if they tries it on. The Vite Rose is mine. I don't part vith her, unless I makes a present o' my ghost to the party as gets her away. But vot I vant all on you to understand is, that you mustn't talk about this little spot in your sleep, nor in your vaking. You might come lumbering agin me, kick my shins, or drop your 'ob nails on my 'and; in that 'ere case, I and my pardner might fancy as somebody had dropped in on the prowl 'a'ter the Vite Rose. If ve does make a mistake, it von't be our fault, but yourn; an' the Lord 'elp you if you do. You von't get over it. That's all.

He flung himself down upon the turf in front of the tent, so that no one could approach it without his knowledge or sanction. He

placed his hand once more inside the tent, to assure himself that Floret was still inside, and then he reclined his shoulder against it, and went on smoking his pipe, plunged in a fit of abstraction.

He continued awake for a long time, but he glided off into a heavy sleep while he thought he was still awake: His pipe dropped from his hand as he believed himself to be upon a race-course with Floret, who, he thought, was in his sight, but separated from him by knots of people. And he fancied he had lost the basket of flowers with which he supplied Floret as fast as she sold those she had had for sale. And he imagined that the Grannam had got his hat, and coat, and boots, and stockings, and was nowhere to be seen, and he was, in fact, in great trouble.

He awoke suddenly, and, to his relief, he found it was a dream.

But he found, also, that he was surrounded by a party of his tribe—men, women, and children—numbering at least thirty.

They stood silently in a circle round him, and awaited his awakening.

He still held, clenched in his hand, the knife with the poisoned point, ready for instant use.

The Grannam had communicated to them the Daddy's last injunctions before he retired to sleep. None of them felt equal to belling the cat, by placing their hands upon his shoulder, to awaken him, so they waited until consciousness should unseal his eyes.

As soon as he became aware of the presence of so large a number of his people, he scrambled up, and wanted to know what it all meant.

Then a woman stepped forward, and said to him:

"I want my little white thorn, Ezar?"

"Do yer?" he responded, with an inquiring stare; "do yer ra'ally? You can't 'ave her. I 'ave never seed her—I 'ave never heerd on her before. I don't know vere she is—but you can 'ave her."

"Hagar Lot begged her from me last night to bring to you," responded the woman who had spoken. "She said that she was a wild white rose, whom you would like to rear; that you would be very fond of it, more kind and tender than a grand'ther to it; that you would nurture it, and tend it till it became a beautiful flower; and that then you would, perhaps, make it a house-dweller, with the means to live like a lady, instead of as a wanderer. But Micah, her father, will not part vith her; so we are here to claim her back."

"I won't part wi' my lawthorn-blossom for nont," exclaimed a stern, dogged-looking young man, with black hair, brown face, and fierce-looking black eyes. "She wur born in the free air, to live a free life; she shall be no house-dweller. Gipsy bred, gipsy dead. So, old man, give me back Ezar, our little white-thorn blossom."

The changes which went over the face of Daddy Windy, while both the woman and the



man were speaking, were something awful to witness. He glanced from one to another, and listened like one in some frightful dream.

Suddenly, with a wild, frantic screech, he dashed at the tent, and dragged forth its tenant by the arms.

It was a child, dressed in a very homely garb.

He held it tightly by the shoulders, as, kneeling down, he glared in its face.

He looked upon the brown face and deep blue eyes of an unmistakable young female gipsy child, though she had long, yellow, sandy locks.

He uttered a howl of despair, as he flung her from him into the burning embers, from which she was rescued by her mother, her father making a gesture as if he would rush upon the Daddy and strangle him.

He was, however, restrained by those who were near him, and who looked with wonder and awe upon the proceedings of the Daddy.

Howling like a maniac, he crawled into the tent, and tossed over its contents, in vain search for Floret. She was not there.

She had disappeared, and not a trace of her was left behind.

He pressed his hands upon his temples—his eyes, his throat; and then, with a demoniacal, guttural growl, brandishing his knife in the air, he dashed off in the direction which he remembered Hagar to have taken the night previously.

Grannam, with husky tones, hastily instructed those gipsies who belonged to their party, to strike their tent, and follow as soon as they could.

"He will do Hagar a mischief," she cried; "he will kill her."

"He will bring upon him the curse and the ban of the tribe, if he do," exclaimed an old, elflocked woman in the group. "The turned face, the back of the hand, the sole of the foot, a long rope, a stout branch, and no mercy for him if he do."

"Follow, follow," cried the Grannam, wringing her hands. "Hagar's a norful woman, but he's a norfuller man. Hi! hi! hi! Old man of all, stop! stay! Let me speak to you! Hi! old man of all! stay for Dianner! O! O! O!"

She darted off after the Daddy, followed by some of the nimblest of the men, while a few remained behind to pack up their traps, and bring up the rear.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Poor little thing! She was as fair as docile,

And with that gentle, serious character,  
As rare in living beings as a fossil

Man, 'midst thy mouldy Mammoths, 'grand Currier!"

Ill-fitted, with her ignorance, to jestle

With this overwhelming world, where all must err:

But she was yet but ten years old, and therefore

Was tranquil, though she knew not why or wherefore."

—BROWN.

Floret had been placed by Daddy Windy scarcely a minute within the gipsy tent, when

the cold night air, which stole in at the entrance, revived her.

Still in a delicate state of health when seized and made prisoner so abruptly by the Daddy, she, from mere physical weakness, fainted with fright, on finding herself once more in the grip of him whom she feared more than all other men. While borne to the spot in which he, with such seeming tenderness, had deposited her, she had undergone a succession of swoons, occasioned by the panic which had seized her acting upon a mind greatly weakened by her severe attack of illness. Each time she had opened her eyes, she had seen the Daddy's wrinkled, brass-colored countenance close to her own, grinning with a hideously-gleeful satisfaction, and the spectacle was too much for her nerves: she therefore had relapsed on beholding it, smitten with a mortal terror into a state of insensibility.

She had recently experienced enough of the comforts of civilized existence to make her look forward to a return to a nomad life with horror, and it was this loathing horror, which paralyzed her.

On opening her eyes in the tent, she found herself in darkness and in silence, conscious only of a peculiar aromatic perfume which played about her nostrils, and which caused a strange feeling of irresistible drowsy languor to steal over her.

And presently she seemed to be in a wondrous land of flowers and sunshine, with lovely lakes and streams, reposing placidly, or wandering and winding as far as the eye could reach, parterres of many rich-hued blossoms spread on either side of her, terrace above terrace, and trees of ample foliage and graceful form were clustered in groups, or formed shadowy avenues in various directions. It was an Elysian garden, as exquisite in loveliness as that land of Eden in which our progenitors wandered when the tree of knowledge bore untasted fruit.

Gradually, however, this "undefiled paradise faded from her eyes, and she became sensible that she was reclining upon the seat of a carriage, swathed, as it were, in shawls and other warm covering.

Opposite to her, with her head leaning against the cushioned side of the vehicle, sat a female, enveloped in a cloak, and her head and face nearly wholly concealed by its hood.

The swaying and jolting of the vehicle told her that she was being borne along at considerable speed. She cast her eyes out of the glass window. She could tell that it was the after part of the day by the position of the sun; but the fields and hills she saw stretching far away were new and strange to her. She could not recognize them, though she strove to do so.

She turned her eyes upon the mysterious figure in the blood-red cloak, who sat opposite to her, motionless. A slight shudder went through her frame. She could not imagine who the person thus strangely enveloped could be.



It was not Mamma Atten—it was not Hatty Marr; she could see that.

She racked her brain, and tried to recollect some person whom she resembled, but in vain.

The only being upon whom her mind showed any disposition to settle was the Countess of Brackleigh, who had, by the way, instructed both Susan and Hatty to keep her name studiously concealed from Floret, and whom she therefore only knew by the appellation of "the lady".

It was some few minutes before Floret could realize her situation. She at length remembered, piece-meal, that, while gathering flowers, she had been seized and carried off by the Daddy.

Her heart sank within her. Could it be the Daddy who sat before her, hidden by that terrible crimson cloak?

An involuntary cry of fear escaped her lips.

Immediately, she became conscious that a pair of large, dark, lustrous eyes, peering from beneath the hood of the cloak, were fastened upon her own.

Then the hood was thrown back, and a dark-skinned face, of handsome proportion, was presented to her. She knew it not. It was not "the lady" who gazed upon her: it was one who regarded her with a stern, searching look of inquiry, and with an expression of contemptuous pity, which, faint and weak as she felt herself to be, made the rebel blood in her veins in an instant bubble and boil.

The strange woman did not speak, and Floret, unable to bear in silence the painful mystery of her situation, presently said, in a complaining tone:

"Where am I going? Whither are you taking me?"

"To one who will be your future guardian," slowly returned her companion, who, as may be surmised, was Hagar Lot; "one who will take care of you, and teach you many things."

"Not to the Daddy! I will not go back to the Daddy any more!" cried Floret, earnestly, though her voice was faint.

"You will not," returned Hagar, with a sneer on her lip, as she gazed steadfastly at her; "you speak with decision, child. How could you prevent yourself being taken to him, if it were so ordered?"

"I would run away from him, I would starve myself, I would drown myself!" she exclaimed, passionately, then remembering, suddenly, Hattie's gentle admonition to her when, on a previous occasion, she had suffered such expressions to escape her, she pressed her hands together, and, bursting into tears, said, in a beseeching tone, which evidently affected Hagar:

"Do not take me to the Daddy! Do not take me to him! I shall break my heart and die if you do!"

"I am taking you from him," replied Hagar, quietly. "I took you out of his clutches, even while he thought you were the most tightly fastened within them. You will probably never see him more; or, at least, not un-

til you will have no cause to fear him."

"O! I shall be so happy!" rejoined Floret, fervently.

There was a silence of a minute or so, and then Floret said, hesitatingly, but bending an earnest look of inquiry upon Hagar:

"Where are you taking me to now?"

"I have already told you, child," she returned; "to one who will have the future care of you."

"To Mamma Atten?" inquired Floret, eagerly.

"Ay!" responded Hagar, sarcastically; "if so she pleases to style herself."

Then, after a pause, she added:

"You must be silent, and not question me. You are weak and faint from want of food: We shall stop shortly, and you shall have something nice to eat—and, mark me, you must eat. You must keep a silent tongue, too; for if you speak a word to those whom you may meet or see around you, nothing can prevent the Daddy seizing you, and carrying you off again. If he does, I will never more take you from him!"

"I will not speak one word, and I will eat as much as I can," she replied, quickly; and added, "I shall be glad to eat, too, for I am so very hungry."

Hagar did not reply, and Floret laid back and closed her eyes, for she felt exhausted.

What a series of strange thoughts went through that child's brain, as she reclined in the corner of the carriage. They were far from happy ones; for they all gradually concentrated into one deep, earnest wish that she were by her mother's side in heaven.

The carriage stopped at a roadside inn. There Hagar saw Floret supplied with light but needful refreshment, and she watched her while she ate, and saw that she kept her promise of satisfying her appetite, and doing so in silence.

Two hours only were passed in the tavern, and then onward they traveled again, until they reached a small station, connected with a railway. It was pitched in a lonely spot, though not far from some important seat of manufacture; but it was night, and Floret, who again was overcome with drowsiness, took little heed of it, and would not recognize it if she saw it in the daylight.

Hagar took places in the cushioned compartment of a train, which shortly afterward arrived. It was unoccupied, save by themselves, and onward still they went at a swifter pace than ever, until the pale-blue atmosphere and cold air of dawn heralded another day.

One more transfer into a somewhat antique postchaise, drawn by seemingly older post-horses, who, in their turn, were driven by a yet more aged post-boy.

On again, over wild tracts of moorland, through a bleak and sterile region, until somewhat more undulating and more wooded ground was gained. Then the carriage turned into a narrow by-road, which proved to be



a gentle acclivity. About half-way up, they turned through a dilapidated stone-buttressed gateway, up a semicircular avenue of trees, and the horses were brought to a stand-still before an ancient mansion of considerable extent, but apparently inhabited only by bats and owls. Everything about the place exhibited evidence of ruin and decay, and nowhere around was there a sign of human life.

Yet the sound of the carriage-wheels brought to the hall-door an old, hard-featured, gloomy-looking man, who, having flung the door wide, called aloud to some one within.

The summons was instantly responded to by two tall, gaunt-looking women, clad in slate-colored dresses of an ancient fashion, whose shriveled faces were pale with confinement, study, or pinching want—perhaps all combined.

Hagar instantly alighted. Poor little Floret, worn out by fatigue to which her unrenewed strength was not equal, was in a deep slumber, and Hagar bade the postilion lift her out of the chaise, and carry her into the house.

Before the bowed and feeble post-boy could comply, a figure sprang before him, dived into the vehicle, and raising Floret with womanly tenderness in his arms, he carried her into the hall, and thence into a reception-room, and laid her upon a faded, creaking old couch, which stood trembling by the wall.

It was Liper Leper.

Hagar watched him with flashing eyes, followed him closely, and kept her gaze fastened upon him until he had deposited his delicate burden carefully upon the resting-place, which, with a quick glance, he had discovered. But she did not observe his eyes linger on Floret's face, or discover by his manner, as he glided away, that he took more interest in the poor child than she ought to have expected from one who knew her to be in some way identified with its fate.

The two thin, grim ladies followed Hagar into the room, and one of them—it was difficult to decide by a glance at their faces which was the eldest—said, in a frigid tone:

"This is the child?"

Hagar turned to her, threw back her hood, and with a proud and haughty gesture, which the occasion did not seem to warrant, replied, in a harsh tone:

"It is!"

Both ladies betrayed for an instant, and for an instant only, surprise, at the tone of voice in which Hagar spoke, and also at her appearance. They retained the same cold, rigid exterior, and the one who had previously spoken continued:

"You are the agent of the lady with whom we have been in communication?"

"I am," returned Hagar, with the same scornful manner.

"You are a gipsy," observed the elderly maiden, who had not yet spoken.

Hagar's eyes flashed fiercely.

"I am that which a Greater Power than you

or any other human creature can influence or control has made me!" she exclaimed, sternly. "What I am, cannot be of any moment to you. Yonder lies the object of your care and of your interests!"

She pointed to the slumbering Floret.

"What you are, may become a subject of moment to us," returned the unbending female, with shrewish emphasis.

"Hush! sister," exclaimed her companion; "let me speak! The terms of my arrangement with the lady with whom I communicated," she proceeded to say, addressing Hagar, "were a year's charges in advance, for board, washing, education, and extras, to be paid down at the very commencement. Unless those terms are complied with—"

Hagar threw a purse upon the table, and interrupting her, said, with an expression of contempt curling her upper lip:

"Open it, and examine its contents. Tell me for what term the sum will suffice."

The female whom she addressed opened the purse with long fingers, which were not unlike the talons of a vulture. They were whiter and softer, but they closed over the purse with a very claw-like movement.

There was money within it—gold and notes. Her sister looked agitated over her shoulder, as with trembling fingers she counted it over.

When she had finished, she said, looking at Hagar with an expression of exultation she could not suppress:

"Here is rather more than will pay for three years' board, instruction, washing, extras, and—"

"Enough," interposed Hagar, coldly. "Write and give me a receipt to that effect."

The ladies were eager to comply with her request. They had a polite snarling respecting the writing of the receipt, but, at length, the one who had secured possession of the purse and its contents wrote the required document, and handed it to Hagar.

The latter examined it, folded it up, and placed it in a pocket-book. Then she addressed both the ladies:

"As you will both," she said, "have the custody of the child, it is necessary to impress upon your minds that you must study her health. While you are not at all restricted as to the description of the diet, nor the rules you may think proper to lay down and follow, you must not forget that it is of the gravest importance that she should live over the three years, for which term she has been consigned to your custody. Remember, she must not die, for if she should, the consequences may be serious to you. More than one life hangs upon hers, and some day she may be a lady of high rank—or she may perish a mere outcast. You will not permit her to stroll beyond the precincts of your house or garden grounds; if you do, the probabilities are strong that you will lose her. In that case you will have to refund part of the money now placed in your hands, and you will possibly be called upon to stand at the bar of public justice upon a charge



which now you cannot imagine. No one will come here to see her—no one, unless it be myself, or the lady who wrote to you, may be permitted to see her. She will not receive any letters, therefore she will not be permitted to write any. If any circumstances should arise which may place you in a position of difficulty with respect to her, you know already where and with whom to communicate. I have to add, that you will address her only by the name of Edith—speak of, and write of her only under that name. She sleeps now heavily. She is under the influence of a narcotic. She will soon awake, and you will at first find it no easy task to conciliate and pacify her. But it must be done. You can lead her to believe that she will sojourn here for a time, and let her hope that she will soon join those whom she best loves on earth. It cannot do much harm to let her hope—the most wretched have at least that anodyne. A box of clothes, made for her, will reach you, probably to-day, and others will be sent from time to time, or you can supply them as they may be needed, and charge for them. I have no more to say. Farewell!”

“Can we offer—” suggested one of the ladies.

“A little refreshment?” subjoined the other.

“Some elder wine?” submitted the first.

“Thin but nourishing—very nourishing!” recommended the second.

Hagar waved her hand.

“I require no refreshment. I bid you look to your charge, and to remember well what you have undertaken to perform.”

So saying, Hagar quitted the room with a stately step, greatly to the admiration of the two ladies, who did not remember to have seen a gipsy of her stamp before.

They saw her to the carriage, saw her enter it, and drive off, and then they returned, chuckling and chattering to each other, into their lone, old, time-shattered cage.

They found, upon their return to the reception-room, that Floret had half risen from the sofa, upon which she had been reclining, and was gazing around her with an expression of unqualified wonder in her eyes, which was not lessened when the two gaunt damsels entered the apartment, and smiled upon her with a benignancy that was anything but reassuring.

Floret had a hundred questions to ask, all trembling on the tip of her tongue, but, during her young life, she had been taught some hard lessons, and she checked herself. She quietly resolved to suffer the two strange-looking women to speak first, and surmised that she should be able to form a more correct notion of her new position by permitting them to talk to her than if she were to put fifty interrogatories to them.

That she was correct in her surmise, she very quickly found, for she was informed, by the two sisters that she was now at a boarding-school, where she would be instructed in the various branches of education, in a complete

and exhaustive manner; so that, when she quitted their establishment, she would be fitted for the highest society in the world, even to be the lady principal of one of the first ladies' colleges in the universe.

There was much that was uttered by these ancient ladies—one interpolating every sentence that the other uttered—which was pure jargon to Floret's ears; but she extracted out of it all, that she was once more a prisoner—was to be caged in the drear old mansion she was now in, she knew not how long—was to be separated from Mamma Atten, and every one else who had spoken to or treated her kindly, for some lengthened period—and, in fact, was to be shut out from all communion with the world, until those who had taken upon themselves to place her where she now was, thought fit to liberate her.

This, perhaps, would have seemed to her a very terrible fate, but for two considerations. The first was, that she should there be safe from the clutches of the Daddy, until he had, perhaps, quite forgotten her, or was dead; and the second was no less important in her eyes. She should here, in seclusion and quiet, be able to make herself mistress of those acquirements and accomplishments which would fit her for the highest society—even that of a young lord.

The two sisters were somewhat amazed, and agreeably amazed, to find that, after a little reflection, the child took their announcement with remarkable resignation. One very heavy sigh—almost a sob—burst from her lips, and she covered her face with her two tiny white hands, as one of the sisters concluded a long homily on the virtues of patience and obedience; but it was only for a moment. She removed her hands, and, turning her liquid eyes upon the grim pair, said, in a low, thoughtful tone:

“I will try to be good and attentive, and to do what you bid me!”

“Angelio child!” ejaculated one of the sisters.

“Would it like some new-laid eggs, and bread and butter, and some nice lukewarm milk and water?” exclaimed the other.

Floret assented, and the mild repast was quickly spread before her. In such fashion was the afterpart of the day got over.

She was conducted to bed early in the evening, and was placed in a large, old-fashioned chamber, the walls of which were covered with dark wainscot oak, blackened by time. Between the panels were raised carvings of quaint faces, and masques, and rich devices of fruit and flowers, and the ceiling was divided into heavy compartments.

She was not permitted to have a light, but this seemed to be a question of small importance, for she was put to bed at daylight, and was not expected to rise until after the breaking of dawn.

Poor little Floret! She felt very, very sad and desolate, when she found herself upon a hard pallet, with very scanty covering, and she



could not keep back the scalding tears which a very keen sense of the misery of her situation forced from her eyelids.

Yet she strove bravely to fight against her wretchedness, for she was animated by the one hope, that she should, in this lone, dreary place, become mistress of all those stores of knowledge to which Hatty had only introduced her, and which, when all her own, would qualify her to converse, on equal terms, with one who now was as much her superior in learning as he was—or, as she thought he was—in rank.

But, in spite of her efforts to be resigned to this new change in her condition, she sobbed long and bitterly—cried herself to sleep, in fact.

Perhaps it was well that she did so.

Night came on, and, gradually, every object in the room was rendered indistinct. Then a door in the corner of the chamber noiselessly opened, and a thin, shivering figure, scantily clad only in a night-garment, crept into the room, and wandered about, as if in search of something.

Upon the table was some bread and butter, and a mug, containing some milk and water, placed there for Floret's supper, if she felt inclined to take it, although the two grim skeleton women, with one breath, assured her that suppers were most injurious meals.

The phantom figure ate the bread and butter greedily; and, when it had eaten every crumb, and had drunk up the whole of the milk and water, it took up a strip of carpet, which had been placed at the side of Floret's bed, and disappeared with it.

As the first pale, gray streak of the dawn shone through the panes of the uncurtained window, the mysterious figure reappeared with the carpet, laid it down on the spot from whence it had taken it, and, glancing at the table, as if expecting to see another supply of bread and butter and milk and water, disappeared, on perceiving that nothing was there but the empty mug.

The sun was shining upon Floret's bed when she awoke, and she arose, dressed, and descended as one of the gaunt ladies was about to seek her, to expatiate upon the evil consequences of the practice of lying late in bed—there, one of them was the loss of a breakfast.

Still, both ladies were gracious to her, and they gave her permission to walk in the garden for an hour, before they laid before her the regulations to which she would have to conform.

Floret availed herself of their offer, and proceeded to the garden, which was very extensive, and led, apparently, through a large orchard to a dense plantation of dark firs.

The garden, many years back, had been a very beautiful one, tastefully laid out with parterres and winding walks; now, it was one tangled mass of flowers and weeds, growing together, intertwined in rank luxuriance.

Floret had but little chance of examining

the beauties of the place, or of lamenting its decay, for, as she wound round one of the serpentine walks, near to a huge bush, almost a tree, of the dark green laurel, flourishing vigorously in the damp which there prevailed, she saw a shadow fall on her path.

She looked up—Liper Leper stood by her side!

He placed his finger on his lip to caution her to silence.

"Listen to me, White Rose," he said, hurriedly, "and do not interrupt me—for I must hasten far, far from this, when I leave you. I do not know even now, that my lagging behind to see and speak to you may not work mischief for both. But what I have to say is at least worth the risk to you. Silver-blossom, you have been again torn from one who has proved to you, and would, as far as might be in her power, still prove to you, as tender as a mother; but she is of humble life, and you are a lady born, though not bred one. Nay, do not start and tremble so—and brush away from your eyes those large crystal dew-drops, for to see them there only makes me feel faint and sick at heart. There, lily of the vale, that smile is bravely done; it will nerve me to my task—let its memory keep you to yours. I tell you that you are a lady born. Some day—some day, star of the flower bank, it shall be proved—I will prove it—"

"You—you Liper?" she cried, eagerly.

"Hush! not a word, May-bloom. Have faith in me, courage—and strength, and confidence in yourself. You have been placed here to remain in secret for two, perhaps three years, but in safety, white pearl, or Hagar would not have brought you hither. Here you can learn all that high-born ladies know, if you work hard; here it will be better, more prudent, and indeed safer, for you to stay than anywhere I know of; and here I counsel you to remain as long as you can, taking heart out of the hope I have given you, of some day being one of the highest and proudest in the land. But there may spring up reasons which I cannot foresee, motives and causes which it would be impossible for me to imagine, which may make it necessary for you to escape from this place. You cannot do so without money. Here is a sum which you must hide away, and never touch until you actually need it for the purpose I have named. Do not hesitate to use it freely, it is honestly mine to give; and you will not, I know, refuse to receive it from me, because you know, golden primrose, you can pay me back again when you are a great lady. Take, too, this dagger," he added, handing to her a steel poniard, sheathed, and having a handle of curious workmanship. "Be careful how you use it, for the point is envenomed. Knowing this, you will know when, and when alone, to use it. Farewell, White Rose, keep up your heart and your spirit. Stay here, learning all you can, as long as you can endure it. Then fly. In your flight seek the people of our tribe. Show to them your left wrist,



and point out the three-sides mark upon it. Say to them, 'I am EL YDAIOUR,' and they will succor you, and help you onward, at the risk of their lives. Farewell, snowflake! sometimes think of me—sometimes pray for me. May the Great Spirit bless you! White Rose, and make you happy, happy—very happy."

He caught up her hand and placed a small packet in it. He kissed her soft fingers gently as he did so, and then glided swiftly away behind the laurel trees.

Floret sank upon the ground, and bowed her face upon her knees.

#### CHAPTER IX.

"Those who sojourn here seldom wish to stay  
For any length of time; an hour or two  
Is quite sufficient; few would spend a day,  
Fewer a week, and none a twelvemonth through.  
The bore is this—they cannot get away,  
Although they labor for't with much ado;

\* \* \* \* \*  
Sometimes they take to flight, with hopes to 'scape  
Their term of torture, scampering many a mile."  
—KENNEDY (a new Pastimime).

Floret quickly learned the character of life she would have to lead at her new home, until circumstances, of which she at present could form no idea, emancipated her from a condition, which if in one sense beneficial to her, was in every other almost insupportable thralldom.

On her return from the garden, after having parted with Liper Leper very dejected, feeling very much as if the last ray of sunshine had been withdrawn from her daily life, she was received by the sisters in solemn state, in a room which was styled the examination-room, and she was made to undergo an examination, which was conducted with so much skill, that in comparatively a few minutes the sisters had not only made themselves acquainted with the very meagre state of Floret's acquirements, but with her disposition, and her capacity to learn.

They found the latter both satisfactory, and proceeded to mark out for her a routine, which to Floret appeared at first of the most formidable character, and she was utterly bewildered when she was informed that she would have to pursue orthographical, grammatical, etymological, geographical, topographical, arithmetical, mathematical, botanical, geological, theological, astronomical, historical, biographical, caligraphical, musical, and artistical studies, together with the acquirement of the French, German, Latin, Greek, Italian, and Spanish languages.

But there was something grand in the sound of the strange words she had heard; and the spirit of emulation, never dormant in her breast, made her heart leap at the very notion of becoming mistress of such a cycle of knowledge. She, therefore, with unaffected willingness, expressed her readiness to commence as soon as she was required to do so. She was, however, condescendingly permitted to have a few days' quiet before she commenced her labors, in order that she might become used to the place, the people within it, and their ways.

During the brief period that ensued between that examination and the commencement of her work, she had ample opportunity of learning all about the mansion, its inhabitants, and their rules, which she desired to know. We may here explain that the ladies, to whom we have introduced our readers as the future custodians, for at least three years, of Floret, were the daughters of the gloomy-looking old man who first opened the hall-door, upon the arrival of the post-chaise at the portal.

That old man was the son of very poor parents, and having shown a peculiar aptitude for learning, was sent by a gentleman, who had noticed his qualifications, to a grammar-school. Here he carried off a scholarship which enabled him to proceed to Oxford, where he obtained high honors and a fellowship. His appetite for learning was amazing; his memory was prodigious; and the very highest professorships were almost within his grasp, when he, in a weak moment, was caught by the beauty of a girl, in extremely humble circumstances, who had nothing but a clear, white skin, bright eyes, and regular features to recommend her. He married her, and had to resign his fellowship. He was afterward presented with a living, which had but a small income, not far from the spot in which he now resided, and he retired to it. While there, he was blessed with two children—twins. He, however, lived most unhappily with his wife. She was extremely ignorant, violent-tempered, and offensively vulgar. He grew soured and morose, secluded himself entirely with his books, and endured the privations which his miserable income enforced, rather than, with such a wife, endeavor to extend his influence, or increase the number of his parishioners.

A town springing up within a few miles of his parish, drew away the chief part of the inhabitants of his village; the church went to decay for want of funds to repair it; and he became comparatively a beggar. His two daughters, while infants, both exhibited tempers of the most violent description, inheriting much of his passionate nature, with a large proportion of their mother's vixenish fury. They came into the world howling, and they kept up a perpetual screeching; they screamed all day, and they yelled all night, and they defied all attempts to pacify them. He prayed for resignation, and for strength to bear the infliction; their mother alternately kissed, slapped, coaxed, smacked, shook, sung to, spanked, or shouted at them, but to no purpose. In spirit of spite, he christened one of them *Até*, and the other *Sycorax*. Time went on—they quarreled, fought, struggled on through three or four years, leaving it an open question which of them—father, mother, or children—had obtained the mastery, or had been most wretched during that period. One day, the wife gave way to an ungovernable tempest of passion, and broke a blood-vessel, which summarily killed her.

The rearing of the little *Até* and *Sycorax* then devolved wholly upon the father. He



filled their minds with learning, and starved their frames. He took a special delight in cramming them with knowledge of almost every branch of which he was master, and in instructing them to live upon nothing.

One of the daughters, exhibiting a taste for music, which, conquering her misery, forced her to sing while even in the throes of griping hunger, was supplied with a music and singing-master, through the kindness of one of the neighboring gentry, who respected her father's intellectual acquirements, although he did not like the man. From him, she learned not only the art of playing upon the pianoforte and singing, but the mysteries of thorough bass. Her father would not permit either of his daughters to have a smattering only of any branch of knowledge. He made them master it thoroughly.

They reaped the advantage of it afterward.

When old enough to be married, there were no suitors for their hands, even in imagination; and, to obtain the bare necessities of life, they took lady-pupils; but, as they nearly killed them by over-study, and by at the same time underfeeding them, they never had many at a time; and even the last few were taken away from them by their electrified parents, to prevent their compulsory departure by dying off.

It was at this period that an execution for debt swept off everything that their father possessed, and then once more the kind neighbor stepped in. He gave them the dilapidated mansion to live in, which they at present occupied; he rescued for them all their educational works, their piano, and the globes; and for their father, his library of classics, and ancient theological MSS., and printed works.

He also caused to be inserted in the Times newspaper an advertisement, worded in a peculiar style. He surmised from what he knew of the sisters Blixenfinik's establishment, that it would be better calculated to get the pupils whom they alone could keep, than if he had employed the usual and ordinary terms.

It stated that the Misses A. and S. Blixenfinik, of Uggelbarnby, in the North Riding of Yorkshire, were prepared to receive, board, and instruct young lady pupils, whose parents required for them the advantages of a sequestered and secluded home—secure and sacred from all external influences. The terms were declared to be moderate, and the strictest privacy in all transactions preserved.

The author of the advertisement knew the class of children the parents of whom such an advertisement would attract; but to do the Misses Blixenfinik justice, they were certainly too simple and unacquainted with the world's ways to have the least suspicion of the truth.

The Marchioness of Westchester happened to see, by chance this advertisement; its peculiarity struck her, because it was applicable in one sense to herself. Hagar Lot, that same night, sought her, to inform her that the old man who had previously the care of Floret had again discovered her, and was upon her track. The Marchioness pointed out the advertise-

ment to Hagar, informed her that she was about to proceed abroad for two or three years, and suggested that, if she could regain the child, it would be a better plan than any they had yet formed respecting her, to place her at the establishment of the Misses Blixenfinik.

Hagar, with a curious eagerness, assented; the Marchioness immediately conducted a correspondence with the Misses Blixenfinik in a feigned name, placed funds at the command of Hagar; and the latter, as we have seen, having successfully snatched Floret from the Daddy's clutches, placed her with the ladies, who, in one respect, gave a tone to her future life.

Floret soon found it insupportably dreary to wander in the garden alone, although she had found and clambered up a high earthen mound, and from thence beheld a long expanse of flat country on one hand, and the dark, turbulent, restless North Sea on the other. At first, never having seen the sea before, it much interested her; but it soon gave rise to despondent thoughts, for it created a wish to go somewhere beyond its limits, and then she reflected that if she did, there would be no friend or relative there to receive and welcome her.

So she avoided the garden, and turned her thoughts to her mental work, and yearned for it. It came, and soon enough; for it quickly absorbed all childish thoughts and fancies, all desire for play or sport, all sprightliness or disposition to frolic—in fact, from dawn to bed-time, all her time was employed, save when occupied by spare and scanty meals, which, as yet, were liberal to what they would be.

There was no other pupil who entered the rooms in which she studied; and though one or the other of the Misses Blixenfinik absented themselves during the day, and she sometimes heard the piano being played upon by a less practiced hand than than that of the sister Até, who was the music-mistress, yet she saw no one.

She soon began to be accustomed to her routine of study, and to make quick progress in all the rudiments of the various branches of learning; for she applied herself to them with enthusiastic earnestness, and both her mistresses taught well.

They understood the art of grounding a pupil thoroughly—their father had made them understand it—and as they led Floret on by lucidly progressive lessons, explaining clearly to her everything she found difficult to comprehend, her advancement was necessarily very rapid.

At first, the novelty of her employment, the wondrous field it opened to her intelligent and naturally inquiring mind, and the incessant application it demanded, robbed her daily life of much of its monotony. She commenced with a task the moment her eyes opened, and she dropped asleep over one which she was conning in bed, when she retired to rest while it was yet daylight. Thus for a time the dull,



vapid, dreariness of the place passed unnoticed by her, because her mind was absorbed by the work it was called upon to perform.

For the first week or two, the sisters Até and Sycorax were bland and gracious to her. She was allowed ten minutes in the garden before dinner, and five minutes after tea. Sometimes she was permitted to take her little frugal supper to bed with her, and that was regarded as a special favor, to one whose strength, it was evident, was not quite equal to the tasks imposed upon it.

This supper consisted of a thin slice of bread—a mere wafer, in the eyes of a boy at the age when he considers a half-quartern loaf by no means beyond his capacity to swallow at a sitting—a few lettuce leaves, and a mug half filled with water, containing a dash of milk in it. Occasionally, an apple would be added to this profusion by old Blixenfinik, who watched her progress with curiosity, and was much moved by her earnestness, her perseverance, and the singular quickness, not only with which she comprehended, but with which she committed to memory whatever was said before her.

This reward was always given to her in secret; the old man explained to her why he gave it her, but he sternly forbade her mentioning his generosity to Até or Sycorax, because, he said, they would take it from her, and after a quarrel over a division of the spoil, eat it themselves.

Sometimes Floret, absorbed in her lessons, or wearied with her day's work, would drop asleep before she had touched her supper. Whenever she did so, it was gone when morning came.

The mug alone remained; and that was always empty.

At first she fancied, on discovering this circumstance, that she had eaten her supper, and afterward had forgotten that she had done so; but the recurrence of the circumstance two or three times convinced her that some one entered the room after she was asleep, and partook of it.

Before this thought flashed across her mind, her great old-fashioned room had caused her no superstitious misgivings; but now she felt her flesh crawl, as she wondered who it could be who stole into it in the night-time, and ate her supper while she slept.

It was not the sisters Até and Sycorax; for they would surely have alluded to the subject when she again carried her evening meal to her bedroom with her. But they said nothing whatever to her respecting it. It could not be old Blixenfinik, for he made her a present of apples, and would hardly take them away again.

And not being him, who could it be? There was only an old woman, who came to assist in the household duties during the day, but she went home when tea was over. She resolved to try and find the mystery out, although she did so with nervous apprehension. She locked her bedroom door one night when she went to

bed, and she tried to keep awake to watch; but, tired out, she dropped insensibly to sleep, and slept until morning.

The bread and butter, the apple, and the milk and water were gone. The mug alone remained, and the door was still locked.

Floret was much disturbed; she said nothing to the sisters, but she began to conceive a horrible fear of going to bed. She felt that she dared not speak of what had taken place, and yet she reflected, with almost indescribable terror, that some unimaginable form sat at that table, opposite the foot of her bed, in the dark hour of the night, perhaps midnight, snapping up her frugal meal, and glaring at her where she lay sleeping.

It was strange that, strive as she would, she could not keep her eyes open until night clothed her room in darkness. She, therefore, could not discover who her mysterious visitor was.

One night, however, she woke up out of a deep sleep, but without making any movement, save that she opened her eyes, and looked straight before her.

The moon was nearly at the full, and its beams shone brightly into the room. They fell upon her face; but they fell, too, upon the face and form of a young girl about her own age, who was clad only in a thin, white night-gown.

She sat on a chair by the table, with her hands clasped upon her knees, and she was gazing wistfully on Floret's face.

At first, Floret felt that she must shriek wildly and frantically; then she found that her heart beat so violently, and she was so sick with fear that her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth.

The seeming phantom sighed several times deeply, and then, stretching her clasped hands toward Floret, she murmured:

"O! if I were only half as kindly treated and as happy as you are!"

And then she laid her face between her folded arms upon the table, and wept.

It was no phantom, no ghost—Floret was sure of that now; but she was still frightened, and trembled very much.

She rose slowly up in the bed, and said, in a low, soft voice: "Who are you?"

The figure, with a gesture of apprehension, started, and, lifting her head from the table, turned her face to Floret.

Then she ran to the foot of the bed, and kneeling down, with clasped hands, she said:

"Do not tell of me—do not betray me to Miss Até, or she will punish me cruelly—O! so very cruelly!"

"Will she?" asked Floret, still shaking like an aspen; "what for?"

"Because I have stolen into your room, and have eaten your supper," replied the shivering girl. "But I could not help it, for they starve me, and so they will you by and by."

Floret looked in her wan, thin face, and shuddered.



"Why do they not give you enough to eat?" she inquired.

"Hush!" whispered the girl, with a frightened gesture. "The sisters sleep not far from this room, and I often hear Miss Até say that she can hear the mice race up and down the rooms, and round the wainscoat—"

"And do they?" inquired Floret, with a choking sensation.

"O yes, very often," returned the girl; "they are starving, too, I think, and, like me, they roam about at night to steal something to eat."

"But who are you, and why do they keep you without food?" inquired Floret, earnestly, in a whisper.

"I am a pupil here. I am an orphan, I believe—I do not know who I am," returned the girl, in a tone of anguish. "But somebody sent me here, and I am not paid for, Miss Até says, and they do not know where to send me to; and so they are slowly starving me to death, to get rid of me."

"O! how horrible!" murmured Floret, in a tone of fright. "I—I, too, am an orphan. I do not know who sent me here. I don't know whether I am paid for—perhaps they will starve me?"

"No," returned the girl, quickly. "You are well paid for, and for three years, and all in one large sum of money. Miss Até told me that, and spat at me. They will feed you for some little time better than they will me; but they will stint you by and by, when some one else comes, and they will take your bed from you, and make you lie, like me, on some old carpets, with scarcely anything to cover you."

"But I won't let them have my bed, and I will have enough to eat!" exclaimed Floret, angrily; "and so shall you. I will bring up such a lot of bread and butter, and apples, to-morrow night—"

"Hush—hush! for Heaven's sake!" whispered the girl, excitedly. "If we are overheard, I shall be put down in the dark hole, where the rats are. O! they have such a dreadful place down underground here."

A cold shiver went over Floret, and some dismal foreboding crept into her mind.

"I will tell you," continued the girl, thoughtfully, "what you might do, and I will bless you for your goodness, if you will." "What is it?" asked Floret, eagerly.

"Spare me, sometimes, if you can, something out of what has been given you in the day to eat, and leave it at night on the table; and if you were to say that you were cold in bed, and to ask for more covering, perhaps they might give it to you, and I could borrow it until just before dawn, then, perhaps, I might get a little sleep, for the cold keeps me awake nearly all night now."

Floret's heart was full. She stretched out her hand to the girl, and she said:

"Come closer to me."

The girl crept up by her side, and took her hand. A cold chill ran up the arm of Floret,

as the girl's thin, icy fingers touched hers; but she twined her arm round her neck, and she whispered in her ear, as hot tears streamed down her cheeks:

"We have both no parents, only God. He will not desert us, and will not let these people kill us. No, no; we will strive against them. It is only for a time—only for a time. I shall be a lady some day—a high, proud, grand lady; think of that. No; they dare not starve me, and they shall not you, for you shall be my sister. Nay, we are sisters, for are we not orphans?"

Her new-found companion clung to her convulsively, and wept upon her shoulder, almost hysterically; but Floret, whispering to her, and kissing her, soothed her, and persuaded her to come into her bed with her. And then, when she crept beneath the coverlet, she embraced her poor, thin, shivering frame, and she made her place her wasted arms about her neck, and so, whispering and weeping, they dropped off into a deep slumber.

Floret woke up as the sun's first rays were darting into the window, but found that her companion had disappeared.

She worked hard all that day, but was not so bright as usual; for she was full of thought. She was reproved sharply, and staggered by being informed that she would have to go to bed supperless. She had intended to save that meal for her new friend. She implored and entreated that it might be given to her, but both sisters were inflexible; and, to her surprise, she found old Blixenfinik harsh to her. He told her that dullness must not go unpunished.

She went out into the garden, and ran about it wildly, in search of something which she could take to her bed-room for her half-starved companion; but the only thing that she could see was an apple, a windfall, lying beneath an apple-tree. She had been cautioned not to touch the windfalls, and she had promised not to do so, but she stooped to pick this one up. She, however, drew back. She remembered her promise, wrung her hands, and determined to return to Sycorax and Até, and make one more appeal to them to revoke their decision to send her to bed supperless.

A voice arrested her step. She turned with affright. It was old Blixenfinik.

He held out to her a large rosy apple.

"Take this," he said, in his short, curt way; "you are entitled to it. A struggle between duty and inclination has taken place in your mind, and duty has triumphed; it should be rewarded. In later days that struggle will be resumed: it will be between passion and principle. Give to principle the triumph, and you shall surely be rewarded. Remember the lesson; it may some day be of value to you. There, hide the apple, and away to bed with you."

She looked wistfully in his face; it seemed kinder in its expression than she had ever before seen it. She kissed the tips of her fingers to him, and hastened away.



That night she lay awake until long after darkness had set in, but she was just dozing when she felt a cold hand pass gently over her face.

She uttered an exclamation of terror, but her companion of the previous night whispered to her, reassured her, and then crept into bed. Floret gave her the apple, which she devoured with avidity; and they lay afterward and talked in an undertone, until sleep closed their eyelids.

It was strange that both girls preserved a strict silence about the events of their early life, and at the end of six months Floret knew only that her nightly companion's name was Ida.

Those six months passed away without any change. Floret, who was called Edith, continued to progress even better than before; for she had still to provide her companion, Ida, with supplementary food, and she was very careful not to incur punishment, which would deprive her of her evening meal. At the expiration of that term, however, a remittance for Ida arrived, and at the same time a new pupil, with, perhaps, as sad a history as either of those who had preceded her. The receipt of the money, and a new pupil, unlocked Ida's prison-doors. She was permitted to associate with the new pupil and with Floret. This event made Floret's everyday life assume a less dreary form, until the two sisters, Até and Sycorax—curious in all their actions—conceived the idea that familiarity of intercourse interfered with the pupils' studies, and absorbed the time which ought to be given to thought; so they were seldom allowed to speak to each other, and never to walk in the garden, except singly.

The advertisement in the Times answered its intended effect, for a fourth, fifth, and sixth pupil arrived at the dreary old mansion, and Floret was compelled to give up her little bed to the newest comer, and, as Ida had predicted, to lie upon a few pieces of carpet on the floor. The meals, too, grew scantier, and she gradually found that she had scarcely enough given her to eat to sustain life, and none to share with Ida, who, though her school-bill had been paid, was but little more liberally supplied than before.

One wretched year closed without further change.

A second wretched year, with a change only for the worse, ensued.

Floret's habiliments were rapidly wearing out, and she was as rapidly growing out of them. She was in her fifteenth year now, and bid fair to be tall, and she was undoubtedly scraggy.

She had never received one word of communication from any one, even from Liper Leper, and she now comprehended keenly enough the desolate nature of her situation.

Two years' severe application to study had enabled her to acquire far more than many who, older than herself, had given to it more than six times the period she had been under

tuition. But she had devoted herself with ardor to her task, and the result was even better than she could have hoped for. Especially had she applied herself to the study of music. Até was very capable of teaching her, and she not only practiced the manipulation of the pianoforte keys with great perseverance, so as to become a proficient player, but she studied the principles of the art closely.

She had a motive: she wished to be able to write down the music of the song "Oranges, sweet Oranges," and to play it in a manner which would not only be remarkable in itself, but which some day might create as great a sensation as it had done on Ascot race-course.

And she entered upon her next year's probation, but with a heavy heart; for she was pinched with want of food, and she hated the shabby clothing, which she had herself altered so as to suit her increasing growth. She began now to look, day after day, at the money which Liper Leper had given her, and to form plans to get away from the dreary old mansion, and the people, who all, save Ida, had become insupportable.

She began to sketch out plans for an escape. She intended to disclose her purpose to Ida only, and if she agreed to accompany her, to take her with her.

Where?

Alas! for both, where?

To London.

## CHAPTER X.

"Yet now despair itself is mild

Even as the wind and waters are;

I could lie down like a tired child,

And weep away the life of care

Which I have borne and yet must bear,

Till death-like sleep shall steal on me,

And I shall feel in the warm air

My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea

Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony."

—SHELLEY.

"Kiss me!—oh, thy lips are cold;  
Round my neck thine arms enroll—  
They are soft, but chill and dead;  
And thy tears upon my head  
Burn like the points of frozen lead."

—MISERY: A FRAGMENT.

Floret entered upon her sixteenth year just as the money which Hagar Lot had deposited with the Sisters Até and Sycorax Blixenfinik was becoming a recollection. Not that Floret knew that she had passed over her fifteenth birthday. She was unacquainted with the anniversary of her natal day, and she did not recollect how many winters had passed over her head—life, indeed, had seemed all winter to her. She only knew and felt that she had ceased to be a child, and that it was time she shook off the thralldom of a school, the blighting burden of a starving dependence, and began to carve a path in the world for herself.

She undoubtedly inherited much of her mother's pride and firmness of character, no little of her determination, and some of her willfulness.

The latter was a defect which had wrought



her mother the greatest unhappiness; and, unfortunately for Floret, the condition of life in which she was likely to be placed was of such a nature that an indulgence of this mischievous quality would probably entail upon her ruin and destruction.

To counterbalance it, she had, however, a purely generous, sympathetic spirit, a high sense of rectitude, an elevated and refined mind, and, withal, a purely innocent nature, and soul free from any conscious sin. The education which she had acquired by a toil of the severest character had done much to soften down the rugged parts of her temperament, which had been called into more prominent action than they would have ever known, had she lived a different life to that she had passed while under the dominion of Daddy Windy; but there was still a rebellious tendency kept up in her breast and brain, by the harsh unkindness and the physical sufferings she was compelled to endure while beneath the roof of the Blixenfiniks, daughters and father.

We are justified in using that order, in speaking of these people, for the daughters having become the support of the establishment, they retaliated upon their once inflexible father. He had enforced upon them, during their childhood, a harsh, merciless, abstinent discipline, and they now retorted upon him by shrilly talking him back into his study whenever he came forth, and by feeding him upon the anticipation of a meal rather than on the meal itself. He had delighted occasionally, when they were famished with hunger, in showing to them a slice of currant-cake, fruit, sometimes wine, and in giving them a long lesson to learn in lieu of the delicacies. They made him their Tantalus now; for if ever they showed to him some tempting dainty, they regaled him only with a raw turnip. They were now his Fates—he called them his Furiæ; but they were equally the merciless Fates of their pupils, for they ruled them, too, with a rod of iron.

Starvation and beating, during the whole of their progress from infancy to womanhood, had rendered them savage and spiteful, and seemed to have created an instinctive yearning to retaliate upon others what they had suffered themselves. They appeared to feel a malicious pleasure in birching the elements of knowledge into their pupils, and in striving to discover where the line between starvation and mere existence could be drawn. Alas! if success in such an investigation entitled them to self-congratulation, they might have complimented themselves amid the silent curses of their lean, haggard, wo-begone pupils.

Floret had experienced many hardships while with Daddy Windy; but the life she led at Ugglebarnby was in several degrees yet harder. Certainly, she had a roof over her head; she had not to follow an eleemosynary occupation—though it might justly be said that she was herself an eleemosynary still—but she had to starve on the hardest fare, and go clad in patched, faded, and scanty habiliments.

The Misses Blixenfinik performed their labors as schoolmistresses to their pupils very completely; for, possessing an extensive and varied amount of knowledge, they imparted it, or as much of it as was possible, to their pupils; they not only crammed them thoroughly, but so effectually, that their pupils could not possibly afterward forget what they had been taught.

This was no conscientious discharge of their professional duties, but it arose from a malignant desire to make the poor, helpless creatures, who were intrusted to their care, suffer similar miseries to those which they had been compelled themselves to endure when they were young and helpless, and likewise to enable them to realize annuities for both by an enforced "rigid" system of economy.

Floret, as she progressed, formed a just conception of what she had to acquire by what she had mastered, and she struggled bravely and enduringly on, in the hope that, by the duration of the term Liper Leper had named, she should be able to turn her back on Ugglebarnby House, and be able to earn a livelihood free from all further dependence upon any one—like Hatty Marr had done.

With this hope burning ever brightly before her, she worked her brain until it ached with over-exertion. She endured the scantiest and most wretched fare without a murmur; she submitted patiently to petulance, to shrewish scoldings, to all but the exercise of the birch rod.

A grand scene occurred one day, when the Sister Sycorax, in a fit of malignity, attempted to strike her with the rod over the shoulders. Floret snatched it from her hand, tore it to shreds, broke some crockery, prized because the quantity in the household was seriously sparse, and gave way to an ebullition of frantic anger, which she ended by rushing into the garden and secreting herself there until long after sun-down.

She frightened Até and Sycorax out of attempting to employ the rod in correcting her again, not, perhaps, that they cared for her passion, or for her hiding herself away, but because, in such another fit, she might destroy more crockery, and, perhaps, something more valuable still. But they never afterward forgot or forgave her conduct.

The result to Floret was incessant misery. In her cloudy gloomy daily life no sunshine penetrated even for a moment. She rose at daybreak to labor, and to test the necessity of food to sustain life by the miserable quantity doled out to her, by the enjoyment with which she sometimes devoured a hard, almost mouldy crust, by the exquisite flavour which a peeled, uncooked turnip seemed on tasting it, and the keen relish with which she devoured it, whenever Ida contrived to obtain one by some species of necromancy, and divided it between them in the dark hours after sundown.

All day it was mental toil; at night, a species of jaded, harassed sleep. There was no change. No one, during the whole time she



had been at Uggelbarnby House, had made a solitary inquiry respecting her—not the strange gipsy woman who conveyed her there, nor Liper Leper, nor the lady in whose beautiful house she had been so carefully tended when ill of that sharp fever.

Nor by Hatty Marr, nor by Mamma Atten, do, not by one living, breathing being.

It would almost have been a relief to the monotony of her miserable life if Daddy Windy had broken in once more upon her, and had attempted to drag her away.

The Misses Blixenfinik had often taunted her with her isolated, deserted condition, and she had to submit to those sneers in silence, for she was utterly without reply—utterly. Poor girl, she felt her condition acutely, and would often pray for that long, long sleep in which it is presumed that the bitter miseries of this world are all forgotten.

When the three years for which Hagar Lot had paid for in advance were on the eve of expiration, and there was still no sign of any communication from those who had placed her there, the sisters commenced playing the parts of the Furix in earnest.

They nearly doubled her work, so that she was engaged from dawn to dark, and they commenced further limiting the already insufficient quantity of food with which she was daily supplied, while their remarks to her were nothing less than a succession of outrages to her.

Then she went carefully over the accomplishments she now possessed. She was mistress of her own language, of the history of her nation and of others; she was not only an excellent arithmetician, but a fair mathematician. She had no mean knowledge of the classics. She could speak and read French and Italian, and could read and translate German and Spanish tolerably. She could draw prettily. She had mastered all the elements which would make her an excellent musician, and a finished performer on the pianoforte, for Miss Até Blixenfinik was an able teacher, and she was an apt pupil. She was passionately fond of music, and she had worked very hard for three years at the study, and had never missed, for one day, her three hours' practice. In short, she found herself to be far more advanced in most of the branches of education than she had imagined herself to be, and, as she believed, she was sufficiently well grounded in knowledge to now take the step which she had long meditated.

By the aid of the money which Liper Leper had placed in her hands, she resolved to find her way to London, and, when there, to seek out Susan Atten. She did not suppose that she should meet with any difficulty in discovering her, and, when she had succeeded in doing that, she believed that the remainder of task would be easy.

She feared, however, strange to say, attempting this feat alone. Naturally self-possessed, self-reliant, and resolute, she yet readied to undertake her flight without a com-

panion. This apprehension arose from sheer nervous weakness. The low scale of diet on which she had been kept had robbed her of powers which she would readily have exhibited, if her physical strength had been sustained by proper food, and enough of it.

But it was not an easy matter to obtain some one upon whom she could rely to accompany her in her flight. When she first decided to make her way to London, her mind reverted at once to her schoolfellow, Ida, as her companion; but her education had made her reflective, and she considered, with no little anxiety and uneasiness, how far she should be justified in inducing Ida to leave the school.

She knew that she was miserable, and, like herself, an orphan; but probably she had some friends who might be deeply grieved and offended if she were to take any such step, and any harm should befall her. Indeed, Floret felt that she should be grieved, too, if, after having prevailed upon her to join her in her flight from the horrors of Blixenfinik House, Ida met with any misfortune, which, perhaps, could not be repaired. So, after long and anxious consideration, she nerved herself to face the difficulties of her task, and resolved to dare the exploit alone.

Under the pretence of sketching from nature, and making an offer to forego her supper, she obtained leave to proceed to the mound, at the farther end of the garden, one evening an hour before sundown.

Here she resolved to look attentively at the landscape beneath her, and endeavor to mark out a track which would be best for her to take on leaving the Blixenfinik mansion. She knew that she would have to depart in darkness, but she hoped that, by noting down the direction it would be advisable to take, she would be able to follow it by the position of the stars, if the sky should happen to be clear; and certainly she did not intend to venture unless it happened to be so.

While seated alone, contemplating the tumbling waves of the turbid North Sea, and cogitating deeply upon her probable future, she felt a cold hand steal round her neck. She uttered a half-suppressed scream, and turned to see who it was who had touched her.

It was Ida. Ida, with a pale, almost livid, face. Ida, with streaming eyes and knitted brows, which had, in their expression, a meaning of a very desperate character.

"Do not you shrink from me, Edith," she sobbed, in a faint and feeble tone; "I have only come to bid you farewell—a long, long farewell."

Floret started, and looked earnestly at her.

"Are you going away?" she inquired, in a quick, eager voice.

"I am!" answered Ida, bowing her head, and covering her face with her hands.

"When?" interrogated Floret, earnestly.

"To-night!" muttered Ida, between her compressed lips. "To-night!" she repeated, in a strange tone; "to-night!"



"To-night!" echoed Floret, with surprise; "whither are you going, Ida?"

"To Heaven, if it will receive me!" cried Ida, clutching Floret's hand, and speaking with a passionate energy; "if not, to perdition—I care not where, so that it is out of this hateful world."

"In the name of mercy, what do you contemplate?" gasped Floret, her wan face growing yet whiter.

"Death, Edith!—death!" responded Ida, wringing her hand convulsively. "I will not live any longer in this horrible world."

"O, Ida, Ida! what has happened to make you utter those terrible words?" cried Floret, agitatedly.

Ida moved her head nearer to her, and turned her thin, flushed face up to hers. She bent her burning, black eyes upon her, wildly, and, in a hissing whisper, said:

"They have been flogging me, Edith—flogging me. I, who am a woman grown—a woman in feeling, heart, and in self-respect. These slow murderers, Até and Sycorax, fastened upon me a fault I had not committed, and, to save the few crumbs which they ought to have doled out to me, they affected anger—rage. Até seized me, and held me tightly, while Sycorax lashed me, with a birchen rod, about the shoulders. Look, Edith, look—here are the weals."

She raised the thin, worn sleeves of her frock, and displayed her poor skeleton arms, scored by many a livid mark.

Floret shuddered.

"I would not have submitted to the infamous indignity!" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"O Edith!" returned Ida, hysterically, "I struggled with them, but I have no strength; I am starving, and I was wholly powerless in the hands of the fiend, Sycorax. I fainted, and I know not how long I remained in that condition; but I awoke in our loathsome sleeping den, and found my hair, face, and neck, saturated, as you see, with water. You were not in the room, and, defying all they may attempt to inflict upon me now, I have come in search of you, to bid you farewell forever—you, Edith, who alone have spoken a kind word to me—who alone have looked tenderly upon me. May God bless you, Edith, and remove you soon from hence. As for me, I can no longer endure the struggle. Life is insupportable to me—it is torture, inexpressible torture, to me—I must end it. O, Edith, I am hopeless—wholly hopeless—and this night I will end my wretched life, for I am an outcast and friendless—utterly friendless."

Floret twined her arms hastily about her neck, and drew her weeping face to her own bosom.

Twice, thrice, half a dozen times she tried to speak to her; but she, too, was weak from long fasting, was easily moved to tears, and, in spite of her effort, was unable to restrain a wild gush of bitter emotion.

At length, she obtained something like self-

control, and she whispered to her thin, trembling, miserable companion:

"Not friendless, Ida—not utterly friendless; for I will be your friend, if you will have me for one."

Ida wrung her hands; she raised her lips and kissed Floret's, and, clinging closer to her, she murmured:

"Ah, yes! I know your tender, sympathetic heart, Edith; but you are powerless to help me, even as I am to aid you. I have nothing to look forward to but misery, wretchedness—something, though I can give it no shape, which I dread to encounter. It will be easier to die than to face it. And you, dear Edith, in how much is your position better than mine? O! let us die together, and end this dreadful, lingering torment, which is conducting us both to the same goal, but by slower and more excruciating torture!"

Floret had often contemplated fastening upon her own life, and destroying it. Now that the act was brought, with startling vividity, before her by another, she shrunk from it with a species of horror. Contemplated at a distance, it was an alternative which she had considered that she was not only justly entitled to use, but that it would be wisdom to adopt it. She thought differently now.

She pressed Ida yet closer to her bosom, and whispered to her:

"No, Ida, dear, you must not make any attempt upon your life. Any deed that bears the dreadful name of murder must be a crime; and the act you contemplate is called self-murder."

"Dear Edith, do not, I entreat you, reason with me!" interposed Ida, earnestly.

But Floret placed her attenuated, transparent fingers before her mouth, and whispered:

"Let me speak! You shall, Ida, bid farewell to this dismal abode, and to its fiendish mistress, to-night, but not by the means you propose."

"By what means?" inquired Ida, eagerly.

"Listen!" continued Floret. "I, like you, I suppose, do not know who I am, or who the people are who placed me here; but I have a friend, of whom I know nothing, save that he is a friend, who parted with me in this garden three years ago. He prophesied that a time would come when I should wish to escape from this dreadful prison, and he told me that I could not do so unless I had money. He gave me money, which I have kept in secret and sacred safety ever since. The time has come, Ida, when to fly from this starvation becomes a duty—I mean to do so to-night. We have endured together great misery, Ida; I do not think it possible we can meet with worse; but if you will freely and voluntarily share my future with me, we will escape from the Furies to-night."

Ida, who had hung tremblingly on every word that left Floret's lips, now fell on her knees before her. She clasped them; she kissed her hands—even her garments.



"I will go with you to the end of the world," she said, with streaming eyes. "O, take me with you, Edith, in common charity, in mercy! If I had risen up at to-morrow's dawn, and found that you had fled without me, I should have fallen down dead. You will take me with you, Edith? Dear Edith, you will not go away and leave me here to drain down a draught of poison, or to fling myself down a deep well in the kitchen-garden, with a reproach at your unkindness upon my lips—you will not?"

"You will go with me, Ida," answered Floret; "but you must be very circumspect—"

"Hush!" exclaimed Ida, suddenly, in a very low tone. "My hearing is very acute—I hear a footstep approaching."

The words had barely quitted her lips, when the form of Miss Sycorax appeared upon the grass and weed-covered walks.

She was looking cautiously about her, but the moment she caught sight of Floret, with Ida crouching at her feet, she increased her pace to a very nimble run.

She made a dash like a tigress at Ida, but Floret rose up and stood between them.

She thrust Miss Sycorax Blixenfinik back. Her wondrous spirit alone gave her the strength to do it.

"Respect your own position, Madam," she exclaimed, in a firm and dignified tone, "and you will command respect; at present, you only inspire fear and hate."

Miss Sycorax gazed at her with unqualified surprise. Having constantly received from Floret a kind of dull, passive obedience, she was not a little startled by the commanding manner in which she addressed her, and the haughty bearing she assumed.

At first she remained speechless, and then she said, with a face white with rage:

"Permit me to suggest to you that it will be unwise in you to interfere. Return to the house; take back with you your drawing-utensils, and retire to your sleeping-apartment. I shall know how to deal with you by and by."

"And I with you, Madam, if you overstep the boundaries of your position," replied Floret, coldly but firmly. "I am acquainted with mine, and, while I do nothing to forfeit my own sense of self-respect, I will suffer no one to abuse—"

"You have begun to play the fine lady somewhat prematurely," interrupted the wrathful Sycorax, with apparent polite calmness, although she trembled with rage; "but you will very shortly, in all probability, have to beg for your bread and butter. A few days, and the term for which we have been paid for your liberal education and board will have terminated. Since no one has made a single inquiry respecting you during your sojourn here, you will, no doubt, have to be thrust forth by us, be confined in a workhouse, and eventually die upon a dunghill."

"You are trying to make us die before we can reach any place to take our last repose in," exclaimed Ida, gathering spirit from Floret's demeanor. "I do fervently hope that you will

end your days on a spot very much less salubrious than the one you have named."

"I will not interchange words with you," cried the Sister Sycorax, grating her teeth malignantly. "You have thought proper to leave your chamber, in which you were ordered to remain; and you shall pass the remainder of this night, and the whole of to-morrow, in the dark vault, sucking your thumbs; for nothing else, I vow, shall touch your lips, unless it be a bat, a spider, or a toad."

Ida uttered a cry of fright.

"I will not go," she said, with expanded eyelids and chattering of teeth.

"We will soon test that," exclaimed the antique maiden Sycorax, exhibiting her teeth after the unattractive manner of a tigress in anger.

She made another dash at Ida, but Floret once more intervened.

"She shall not go!" she exclaimed, spiritedly. "That horrible vault is not fit for a human creature to step into, far less to remain in. Woman, you are a schoolmistress, but not an irresponsible tyrant. She shall not go. My blood is up now, and I will not suffer you to drag her thither without doing all in my power to resist you."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Sycorax, deliriously; "ho! ho!" she grinned, spasmodically; "he! he! We are in a state of mutiny—we are in open rebellion. The whole establishment is, for all I know, on the eve of an insurrection. Minion! kinless! nameless! rebel in the vault, you shall obey us here!"

"We will obey you no longer anywhere!" exclaimed Ida, holding her clenched hands toward her, and speaking with desperate determination. "You have starved me on to the confines of death, you have tried by the lash to drive me into its jaws—I will endure no more. I will fly from you, but I leave you my curse! You shall not close your eyes but you shall see my emaciated, wasted form before your eyes. If I die in my flight from you of exhaustion, as I fear I must, my gaunt shadowy phantom shall come to your bedside at night, and harry you with shrieks and cries, bidding you despair, for there will be no hope for you here or hereafter. Henceforth I will haunt you like a spectre!"

"This is too much!" cried Sycorax, with a wild howl. "You sisters in rebellion shall entertain yourselves in the vaults to-night. You shall both pass twenty-four hours in them. There is one cell for each, and, no doubt, before they have run out, you will be humble enough to beg for mercy and leniency. I will go and fetch Até, and other assistance. We will speedily look you up, in spite of your struggles and promises to behave better for the future. Até! Sister Até! Até! Até!" she called, shrilly, and ran in the direction of the house.

Floret caught hold of Ida's wrist, and pointed to the gloomy fire in the distance.

"Not a word to me, Ida," she said, in a



quick undertone, "but take the path to the left. There is a channel in the undergrowth along which you can easily pass; it leads to the base of the hill. At the bottom you will find three routes. The right-hand path appears to double back to the garden. On the contrary, it will conduct you by a near way to the black firs; proceed along it until you reach them; hide yourself among them anywhere there without dread. There will be nothing there more evil than your thoughts or your hopes to harm you, so have no fear. I will follow you when night has set in. I will elap my hands thrice when I reach the entrance of the plantation. Do not move until you hear that sound, then come forth and join me. Quick, Ida, away with you, or they will be back here to seize you, and I shall not be able to defend you."

Ida twined her arms about Floret with a moaning cry, and kissed her passionately. Then she hurried down the path to the left, and was almost instantly out of sight.

Floret stood still and listened; her heart beat violently; she heard Ida's foot pressing on the dried twigs, and cracking them as she moved onward. She knew that she was very feeble, and she feared that she would not be able to get far enough away before the sisters and their assistants arrived and discovered the path she had taken, and she trembled so excessively that she was obliged to cling to the branch of a tree for support.

But the sound of Ida's retreating footsteps died on her ear, and they ceased entirely as the rapid beat of feet in the opposite direction arose in the still air.

She knew by those sounds that the enemy was at hand, and she seemed to gather strength from the knowledge.

She drew herself up erect, and standing proudly, firmly awaited the arrival of the *Furies*.

Pale and wasted as she was, attenuated almost to a shadow, with garments thin and poor clinging to her form as closely, and falling as gracefully as the drapery upon the maidens who have sprung from the magic chisels of the old Greek sculptors, she yet looked strikingly commanding, and wondrously beautiful.

She was as tall as she was almost ever likely to be; fairer, it was not possible to be; more exquisitely formed, she could not be; and poor though she was, duchess though she might be, she could not have looked loftier or more dignified than she did at that moment.

She turned her large lustrous blue eyes, glittering and stern, toward the direction in which she heard the sounds of advancing feet. She for a moment only seemed to hear some words breathed in her ear by the voice of Liper Leper.

She started, shrunk back, but the emotion was only momentary, she immediately recovered her self-possession, and stood expectantly as before.

She was not long in suspense. Sister Sycorax quickly made her appearance, rod in hand,

and panting for breath. She was closely followed by Até, who carried in her hand a small hank of cord, which was about the thickness of her little finger. They were gyves for Ida and Floret. Behind them came the pupils, gliding to the spot like a band of famine-stricken spectres who had died of starvation.

The two sisters glared round for Ida, and then fastened their inflamed eyes upon Floret, who stood calm and motionless.

The pupils turned, too, their large hollow eyes upon Floret, and silently ranged themselves round her.

For a minute not a word was spoken.

## CHAPTER XI.

"Thou poor pale piece  
Of outcast earth in darkness! What a change  
From yesterday! Thy darling hope so near  
(Long-labored prize), O how ambition flush'd  
Thy glowing cheek! ambition truly great,  
Of virtuous praise  
(Sly, treacherous miner!) working in the dark,  
Smil'd at thy well concerted scheme."

—LIFE, DEATH, AND IMMORTALITY.

Sister Sycorax was the first to break the momentous silence.

She shook the rod and her clenched fist in Floret's face.

Floret knitted her brow, and compressed her lips, but did not answer.

"Speak, you disaffected, disloyal, abandoned pervert," cried Até, maliciously.

"Seek her," replied Floret, apparently unmoved by the wrathful, threatening countenances of the two sisters. "You will find her quicker and more easily than you will extort from me whither she has gone."

"Speak, or I'll strike you to the earth with this rod," cried Sycorax, passionately.

Floret raised her finger warningly.

"Beware how you approach that deadly weapon too closely to me," she said, sternly. "You once attempted the act; you afterward repented it. If you move it so near to me that but one spray of it touches my dress, I will turn upon you and sting you as fatally as would an adder."

Até threw up her hands, and flourished the cords about wildly.

"You will do what?" exclaimed Sycorax taking a firmer grasp of the rod, and sidling up toward her.

"Use this weapon!" returned Floret, sharply, between her set teeth.

She drew forth swiftly from her bosom the poniard which Liper Leper had given to her. She had worn it where she could instantly reach it night and day since she had received it from him. She whipped off the sheath, and held it up firmly, grasping the handle, to the view of Sycorax.

"Its point is tipped with a subtle poison, and a scratch from it proves inevitably fatal," she subjoined. "Will you dare, woman of the merciless heart, to test it?"

Sycorax retreated hastily several steps.

"Wretch!" she screamed, "would you commit murder?"

"I will at any cost or sacrifice exact my re-



venge if you inflict upon me a blow, however slight, with that weapon, if your intent be to punish or to degrade me," returned Floret, resolutely.

"You will be hanged, monster!" cried At , with a rapid, nervous twitching of the nose, and a swift blinking of the eyes.

The lip of Floret curled scornfully and derisively.

"That would be a less degradation to me than to bear the humiliation of a blow from that bundle of withes, the contact of any one of which is an insult which nothing can wash out. As a child, it might not have wounded my pride; as a woman, I will resent it at the cost of my life."

"A woman?" sneered At , with a curiously-empty laugh, but betraying a very wholesome fear that she would keep her word if either of them struck her—"a woman! The creature is deranged. Leave her, my precious Psyche"—that was At 's endearing abbreviation of Sycorax—"leave her, my soul, my butterfly, and let us search for the other rebel. We shall find her hidden somewhere in the garden, I am sure, and when we have safely disposed of her, we shall find a way to manage this dreadful creature. Hasten, Psyche!—come birds, come chicks, we will soon net the naughty fly-away!"

So saying, she, keeping somewhat wide of Floret's reach, hastened up the garden.

Sycorax shook rod and hand at Floret, and foamed at the mouth.

"Wait until you sleep, vixen," she cried, between her teeth; "I'll bind you hand and feet, take your murderous plaything from you, and flay the devil out of your dainty limbs, I will—I will!"

She moved off after her sister as she spoke, and made a wide circuit, too, round Floret; for she did not like the look of her eyes, they were fixed so steadfastly upon her, and they glittered so brightly.

The chicks, the birds—by which fond name At  meant her starved, ill-treated pupils—followed the sisters; but they looked piteously on Floret as they moved away.

One clasped her hands, and muttered:

"O Edith! do not continue perverse! Fall upon your knees, and implore pardon, or they will kill you!"

Floret unknitted her brow; but she only said:

"Pray for me!"

"I will—I will!" muttered the girl, as she glided away.

"I will for you," responded Floret, soliloquizing; "Heaven knows that if you remain here you will have need of my prayers!"

She, too, then hastened from the spot, and entered the house with a swift, light step.

She proceeded to the chamber, which by a fiction was termed hers, and selected some necessary clothing, both of her own and Ida's. She put on her brown beaver hat, and her cloak; she secreted beneath her cloak Ida's hat, adorned, like her own, with a soiled white

ostrich feather, once a handsome plume, and she wore her mantle over her own. She made up all she wished to take away with her into two bundles; they were not large ones, be it understood—she was not, nor was Ida, sufficiently well provided with attire for that—but they contained everything likely to be of use to her and to Ida, and to enable them to reach London without being absolutely distressed for a change.

This done, she began to concert measures by which she could escape from the house unseen.

Old Blixenfinik was, she knew, in his study, poring over an old Latin MS., sent to him for translation by a neighboring clergyman. The woman who attended to the hardest portion of the household duties had departed from the house, and was on her way home. The old mansion appeared silent and deserted, for the Furia were yet beating the rank undergrowth in the garden, expecting to find the trembling hare of which they were in search of cowering beneath one of the bushes, half-dead with terror.

Floret, with her money, and her poniard in the bosom of her dress, and a bundle in each hand, glided down the stairs like a phantom.

As she reached the hall, she, to her dismay, saw, advancing toward her along the passage, with out-stretched hands, old Blixenfinik. He was calling out, although in feeble tones:

"Stop her! stop her!"

She retreated up a few of the stairs again hastily and in affright but, to her relief, she saw him hurry past her, and almost immediately she discovered that he was in pursuit of a lean anatomy of a cat, which having unexpectedly perceived an opportunity of stealing his supper, had pounced upon it, and made off with it.

Again she descended to the hall, and glided out of the house into the garden, hoping, by crouching down and crawling stealthily beneath the bushes, to escape observation, and join Ida before her departure could be discovered.

But again she was doomed to the peril of being detected in her flight, for while creeping along the bramble-covered pathway, she suddenly heard the sisters Sycorax and At  advancing, beating the bushes, in her direction.

She saw that there was no possibility of escape. If she attempted to gain the path leading to the plantation of firs, she could not do so without being seen; if she endeavored to reach the house again, it would be at the price of certain discovery.

She instantly forced her way beneath a huge, wide-spreading holly-tree, and lay there, flat to the earth, and perfectly motionless. Her heart almost stayed its beating, and she felt as if she were dying, when Dame Sycorax stopped a few feet from the holly-bush, and cried aloud:

"She can't be far off now! Search well, girls; creep beneath the bushes! A good supper to-night, an early breakfast, and a



whole holiday to her who unkennels the delinquent!"

Floret heard the crashing of the bushes, the beating of the leaves, the trampling of the grass, as the circling searchers drew nearer and nearer to her.

She experienced a faint, cold, deathly numbness steal over her. She exerted herself not to let even her breathing be heard; yet she felt every moment as if she must shriek aloud.

What her sensation was, on suddenly feeling a hand laid upon her shoulder, and on raising her head, beholding a pair of large, dark, glittering eyes glaring into her own, must be imagined; it is impossible to describe it. But as the near approach of certain death is more terrible than death itself, so, perhaps, the imminence of discovery was more frightful to Floret than probably actual discovery would have been.

In an instant she recognized the school fellow who had advised her to yield, and implore for mercy.

"Do not betray me!" she murmured, impulsively and beseechingly.

"I will not!" returned the hollow-eyed girl.

"Are you going to run away?"

"I am!" muttered Floret.

"I pray that you may get safely away!" she whispered, in the faintest tone. "I am to be taken away to-morrow, thank God! Good bye for ever!"

A moment more she crawled out from beneath the holly-bush. Sycorax watched her as she rose up.

"Well," she exclaimed, interrogatively.

"She is not here!" replied the girl.

"Aha!" cried Sycorax, placing her hand on the holly leaves. "I thought I heard you muttering."

"You did," she returned composedly. "I disturbed a large black snake, which glided toward your feet. I thought you could not fail to see it."

"Yah!" screeched Miss Sycorax, and bounded from the spot."

The girl followed her, saying:

"I have no doubt, Miss Sycorax, you will find Ida in her room. She has most likely got there by this time, and has hidden herself in a cupboard or some other secret place."

Miss Sycorax muttered something in reply, but Floret did not catch what. The voices, however, died away, and the sounds soon ceased altogether.

By that she knew that the searching-party had returned to the house, and she crept forth from her lurking place.

The sun had sunk beneath the horizon, and the sky was becoming violet-tinted. It was very clear, and the night promised, when the moon rose, to be singularly bright. But she had no wish to remain in the vicinity of Ugglebarnby House until it was broad moonlight. She, therefore, hurried along the path she had pointed out to Ida, and she paused not, though she panted much and felt greatly fatigued,

until she reached the plantation of the black firs.

She shivered as she cast her eyes into its gloomy depths; an active imagination instantly set to work to people them with intangible forms. Then, too, the place was so silent. No human creature could surely be hidden away in any part of it. Probably Ida had wanted strength to reach there—perhaps had perished on her way. The thought struck her painfully, and made her future prospects appear more lonely and dreary than they had yet seemed to her.

But she made a struggle to reassure herself. She placed the two bundles upon the turf, and she clapped her hands sharply thrice.

A figure rose up almost at her feet, so suddenly that she screamed with fright.

But the next moment she felt herself embraced, and she heard Ida's soft voice breathe in her ear:

"Dear, dear Edith, I am so overjoyed that you have come at last; I have been almost dead with terror since I have been here."

Floret returned her embrace with unfeigned pleasure. She then hastily divested herself of her supernumerary cloak, and handed it to Ida, with her hat. The latter quickly attired herself, seized one of the bundles, and said, in an anxious tone, to Floret:

"Come along, Edith; let us run until we get far, far away from this hateful place."

"Do not agitate yourself now, dear Ida," returned Floret; "we are, for the present, safe. You may be sure that we shall not be searched for here. We had better sit quietly down, at the foot of a tree, and wait until the moon rises to light us on our way. It is easy to lose ourselves in the succession of vistas which form a path every way you look; and if we should do so, we should wander about till morning, and perhaps die here of hunger and fatigue."

"How horrible!" ejaculated Ida, nervously.

"Do not be afraid," rejoined Floret. "When I was young—very young, Ida—I used to be almost constantly in the air, passing from place to place, and often through such woods as this. Then I was taught how to guide my way by the stars, or by the pathway of the moon, if at any time I should happen to lose myself. I have not forgotten those lessons; so we will rest ourselves, calm our excited spirits, and be prepared to move when the beams of the moon cast their silver lustre on the grassy turf beneath the trees."

So they sat themselves down at the base of a tall red pine, and entered into quiet converse.

They talked of the world before them, and of what they should do to live, and how they would live when they obtained the means. Both had an idea of the struggles and the trials they were likely to have to encounter, and they were both prepared to face them bravely.

While they were still deep in earnest and hopeful conversation, Floret perceived long, tremulous streams of crystal light pour slowly



through the interstices of the inwoven branches, and between the tall, clustering columns of the tall pines, falling with lustrous radiance upon the still grass which paved the earth, spreading softly, in various directions, delicate vails of silver frost.

She gazed upward at the sky, through an opening in the sombre vegetation above her, and then, touching Ida lightly on the wrist, she rose up, and said:

"Ida, it is time."

Ida arose with such a sweet smile of gladness upon her face, as it had not seen for years. Floret felt her heart leap at the sight.

"And shall I ever show such quiet, deep joy on my features?" she thought, with a sigh.

She turned to Ida, and said:

"Look at the heavens, Ida. Yonder is the North Star, upon my right hand; behind me, but moving toward the west, is the moon. Observe the shadows of the trees, as they fall upon the grass. Remember, that the trees move not, but the moon does; and, therefore, the shadows move, too—they travel from west to north, and thence to the east. By keeping the North Star in sight, and by observing the direction in which the shadows of the trees lie, we shall be able to tell, as we pass through this plantation, whether we are deviating from our path or not."

"I place myself implicitly under your guidance, and whatever you direct me to do I will obey," replied Ida; "I know that in years I am older than you, but you have more strength of mind, more resolution, and more persevering energy than I have."

Floret smiled.

"It is pleasant to be flattered," she said, in one of her sweetest tones; "but do not continue it, dear Ida; for if you do, I shall, perhaps, become vain, and then I shall prove hateful."

"Like Miss Até? Never!" ejaculated Ida, with fervor; then she added, thoughtfully, "It has often occurred to me that it was a pity old Blixenfinik, when he played the part of Jupiter in naming her—she could never have been christened, I am sure of that—did not perform the remaining portion of the drama."

"Let me remember," said Floret: "Jupiter, I think, dragged his daughter, Até, from the society of the gods and goddesses by the hair of the head, banished her from heaven, and sent her to dwell upon earth."

"Yes," responded Ida, quickly; "and she has taken up her abode at Ugglebarney, where she incites poor girls like me to wickedness. O Edith, sometimes when she has been twitching her nose up and down, and blinking her eyes at me as she scolded me, I have looked at her, and felt so shockingly wicked. What a shame it was for that pompous, arrogant old Jupiter to send his hateful daughter down to earth—he ought to have sent her to—"

Ida paused abruptly.

"To a coal mine," suggested Floret, with a sly look at her.

"Yes," returned Ida, laughing; "supposing that it was on fire, and the combustibles were sulphur and pitch. It was wrong to put an accent at the end of her name, and to leave the letter H from it; it ought to have led off with it—she was so identified with the word. What a many thin slice of bread and butter the pronunciation of her detestable name has cost poor Athalie, who left before you came. Whenever she wanted to be spiteful to Miss Até, she would always place H before her name, and aspirate it vigorously. Miss Até would call upon her to pronounce it properly, and repeat 'A'te' a dozen times. But Athalie would start off rapidly, and say, scornfully, 'Hate, Hate, Hate, Hate, Hate, Hate, Hate,' and I used to love her so for it."

In such pleasant talk did they beguile the long night. Floret led the way. They occasionally rested themselves, and then rose up and went on again, until an hour or so of dawn, when they reentered themselves in a very sequestered spot, and tried to talk to keep themselves awake.

But exhausted nature refused to make further effort; and so, making themselves pillows of their bundles, they reclined beneath a tree, folded in each other's arms. Ida laid her face on Floret's breast, and Floret her soft, wan cheek on Ida's forehead, and so they both glided off into a deep slumber.

The sun was rising when, faint and weak, they opened their eyes. They rose up, but it was with difficulty that they tottered on, they were so faint for want of food. At length, welcome sight, a cottage presented itself before them, and they made their way to it.

Light-footed, for they seemed almost to tread on air; light-headed, for they felt giddy and afflicted with vertigo; exhausted, because they feared they should fall each step they took, they reached the cottage only with the greatest difficulty.

A woman was standing at the door. She stared hard at them as they came up to her.

"We want something to eat," said Floret, feebly.

"We are starving," exclaimed Ida.

"My God!" ejaculated the woman, as she looked at their wan, pinched countenances.

"We will pay you," murmured Floret.

The woman's eyes became moist and silent, and her lips trembled.

She did not speak, but she drew them gently and tenderly into the cottage.

Presently she murmured:

"I have girls of my own, they are away from me at service. If they should be like you—the Lord! the Lord! children, you make my heart ache."

A few minutes only, and a basin of warm bread and milk was placed before them.

Although they yearned for it, and were about to commence upon it voraciously, the good woman checked them, and caused them to begin sparingly at first, that too full a meal should not have a dangerous effect upon them.



They remained at the cottage the whole of that day. The good woman would not let them leave, she said, until they had at least one good day's food, and they did have such a one with her as they had not had at Ugglebarby House during the three years they were imprisoned there.

Floret gave the woman money to buy them some meat with, but the good creature refused to take anything beyond it for the milk, bread, and shelter.

A bed was made up for them by her, for she was living in her cottage alone, and they enjoyed a long night's rest, as well as that which they had had during the day. On the following morning they set out upon their journey, recruited and refreshed beyond what they could have possibly hoped for, and they took it as a good omen.

Floret, after a careful meditation, decided that it would be the most prudent plan to walk to London. The distance was fearful, but time was not an object, and money was.

Floret understood something of the task, for she, when a child, had walked many a hundred miles with Daddy Windy. She thought she might certainly do it now, when she had such an object in view.

And so they went on walking during the day, sleeping at night at some cottage where they could be accommodated, or in an out-house, or even under a haystack, when no other place of repose was at hand.

They made thus their way into Nottinghamshire, and one morning their path lay through a wood.

Suddenly they came upon a pool of clear water, imbedded in a nest of trees. Upon its margin grew a profusion of blue, crimson, purple, and golden flowers, and upon its surface lay broad water-lilies, reposing or flinging out their shoots and buds in various directions.

Floret paused, and gazed wildly round her. She knew the spot again, she recollected every feature it presented.

She said to Ida with deep emotion :

"Let us sit down here. I will sing you a song I used to be fond of, and it was once of much service to me."

They sat down by the side of the pool, and then Floret, in a richer, deeper, but not either sweeter or clearer voice than in childhood, sung :

"Oranges, sweet oranges !

Pulpy cheeks that peep through trees,  
The crabst' churl in all the south,  
Would hardly let a thirsty mouth,  
Yearn for thee, and long to taste,  
Nor grant one golden kiss at last."

While her soft, silver-bell like tones were yet quivering in the air, a rich, manly, though youthful voice, responded from a short distance.

It sang a burden, thus :

"La ! la ! La, sol, fa, mi,

My lady looked through the orange tree.

Floret caught Ida by the wrist.

"Some one is coming this way, let us hide ourselves," she said, in an under-tone.

Ida instantly obeyed her, and they dived beneath the thick undergrowth that skirted the pond, and there crouched down, securely concealed in a leafy cover, but through which they could gaze without being seen.

They were scarcely hidden, when footsteps approached the pool. Almost immediately, two young men, attired in sporting garb, and followed by dogs and two keepers, approached the pool.

One of them Floret instantly recognized as Lord Victor. The other she knew not—he was young, tall, dark, and handsome.

But, oh ! how beautiful in her eyes had Lord Victor become. He was now a man, with a large, clear, dreamy, and yet lustrous eye, and features regular and delicately shaped, enough to make the heart of any woman ache.

Floret's heart beat violently, as she saw him gazing anxiously and earnestly about him. Presently he said :

"The voice sounded as if it came from some one seated on this spot."

"One of the young ladies from the castle," suggested his friend. "Perhaps hiding somewhere in sport. Let us unkennel her, Victor."

"No !" he returned hastily and thoughtfully. "No, it is no young lady from the castle, but one of the fairest and most beautiful little fays imagination can conceive, who haunts this fairy pool." He raised his voice to an unnecessary loudness, as he added : "She only discloses her presence to those who wish to see her as anxiously as I do, and when I return here at sunset, as I shall do, and alone, I hope from my soul that she will reveal herself to me."

His companion laughed lustily.

"Upon my soul, Victor," he said, "you are as full of romance as ever. *Alma Mater's* hard teachings do not crush it out of you."

"And never will," he rejoined. "Away with you, Vaughan, we will beat the covers yonder, we shall have excellent sport there."

And so they hurried away.

Floret remained perfectly motionless until the distant report of a gun told her that they might quit their hiding-place without the risk of discovery. She then crawled out, followed by Ida.

The latter was about to speak to her, but to her surprise she saw silent tears coursing each other down her cheeks, and she heard her mutter, as she glanced scornfully at her mean attire :

"Always a beggar !"

Before Ida could express the surprise she felt, Floret seized her by the hand, and said, earnestly :

"Let us fly from this place, Ida—far, far from it."

And they turned to strike into the depths of the wood ; but they, to their horror and amazement, found themselves confronted by a scraggy, fierce-looking old gipsy, who was glaring upon Floret with the aspect of a maniac.



"I know'd the voice," he exclaimed, in harsh and guttural tones. "I know'd the voice; the sounds on it tingled in my old ears like the fairy music which comes out o' silver 'iacynth bells. Sixteen bunches a pennee, sweet lawender! I'm right this 'ere time—sixteen bunches a pennee!"

## CHAPTER XII.

"And she is now his captive—troun  
In his fierce hands, alive, alone;  
His the infuriate band she sees,  
All infidels—all enemies!  
What was the daring hope that then  
Cross'd her like lightning, as again,  
With boldness that despair had lent,  
She darted through the armed crowd  
A look so searching, so intent,  
That ev'n the sternest warrior bow'd  
Abash'd, when he her glances caught,  
As if he guess'd whence from they sought!  
But no—she sees him not.

—THE FIRE-WORSHIPERS.

As the harsh sounds of Daddy Windy's voice grated disagreeably in the ears of Ida, Floret stood speechless, transfixed with horror.

The incidents of the past three years, monotonous, long drawn out, and yet, terrible as they were, vanished from her memory as though they had never happened. She seemed to be still on the green and flower-decked hill at Reigate, gathering the wild blossoms and trembling grasses which grew there, disturbed only at that moment in her pleasant occupation by the unexpected and unwelcome obtrusion of the Daddy's form upon her unterrified eyes.

Again thoughts, agonizing and depressing, rushed through her mind, attended by some of the most humiliating memories of the past. They pointed to an abasing and degrading future; they suggested a vagrant, wandering life; they seemed to trample out all latent, but cherished, hopes of a brilliant termination to a path thronged with trials and troubles, and to foretell shame, humiliation, misery, and death.

But that she was paralyzed with horror, she would have fled, shrieking—fled in one direction where she had an instinctive conviction that succor and protection would be extended to her.

But she was held back, not alone by that strange paralyzing fright, which had rendered her limbs powerless, but by a distressing impression that the Daddy had some legal, some rightful, claim to compel her to accept his guardianship, and to follow his fortunes, until she reached an age when the law gave to her the power of acting for herself.

With this conceit pressing upon her brain she perceived that, were she to flee from him now, and beseech the protection of one who she felt would instantly afford it, she should, perhaps, only succeed in unfolding a series of circumstances with which her young life had been connected to him from whom she was anxious to conceal them, and this without really effecting her wished-for object.

The question whether it was prudent for her to remain or to fly was settled by the Daddy, who, while he uttered his curious nasal chant,

clutched at her dress and mantle with both hands, so that, had she attempted to escape from him, he would have pulled her back with a savage strength and ferocity with which she would have been unable to struggle successfully.

The considerations which appeared to blister the brain of Floret, as they rushed through it, did not influence Ida.

She perceived the grinning, saffron-hued, haggard visage of the Daddy lighted up by the flashing glitter of his delirious eyes with an overwhelming, suffocating terror. She saw him fasten his talon-like claws upon the frail dress of Floret, and she heard a screech of exultation, such as a famished vulture would give on discovering the unexpected carcass of a dead lamb, burst from his lips, and then her tongue, which had been chained by fright, was loosened.

She sent forth a long, wild, piercing scream, which she followed with a dozen others, all given with extreme rapidity, and with a brilliancy which not only carried them above all other sounds, but which caused all the hollows and the avenues of the old wood to catch them up, and re-echo them many more times than they were uttered.

Startled herself by the abrupt and piercing loudness of her voice, as it rang through the quiet air, she paused breathlessly, and stood motionless.

The Daddy, however, did not permit the silence to continue, for he pressed his teeth upon his nether lip, and blew between them a sharp whistle having a peculiar cadence.

His signal, for such it was, was instantly followed by a loud halloo from a distant part of the wood, the firing of a gun, and the baying of some dogs.

Ida hearing them, sprang excitedly upon the Daddy, and fastened her hands on his collar. She endeavored to drag him from Floret.

"Quit your hold of my companion!" she cried; "she has no money to give you—we are both poor! Take your wicked hands from her, or you shall be put in prison, you frightful old man! Let go your hold!"

The Daddy turned his grinning face to hers. He felt, in a double sense, that she had no power to move him.

"When I lets go my 'old on her, my vite daisydowndilly," he exclaimed, between his gnashing teeth, "I lets go my 'art strings vith her. No! no! She's mine—she's mine! I sticks to her now vonce for all! Te-vice I've been robbed on her—te-vice—an' both times by vomen! The-vice it ain't to be done without murder—murder, my own Vite Rose! Murder, my silver daisy! Your murder, my Vite Rose, if any von tries to swoop off vith you, or you 'empts to play the double on poor old Daddy!"

"Help!" screamed Ida; "help! help! help!"

"Hilloah! hoy!" responded a youthful voice from the same part of the wood from whence the previous shout had proceeded.



The shout was again accompanied by the baying of dogs.

"Help!—help!" again shrieked Ida, pulling with all her strength at the Daddy's collar.

Floret, white as a ghost, stood seemingly helpless and powerless to move.

"Jest put a muffler on this pipin' finch!" abruptly exclaimed the Daddy, addressing some one apparently in the rear of Ida. He did not himself attempt to remove her hands from his collar, but kept his grip firmly upon the dress of Floret.

Ida suddenly felt a pair of hard, horny hands placed over her mouth, and her neck was immediately jerked backward with such a violence that she was compelled to withdraw her hands from the Daddy's collar.

The next moment she found herself struggling in the arms of a strong man, who, having released for an instant her mouth from his suffocating pressure, dexterously passed a silk handkerchief about her lips, and fastened it behind her head. It served the purpose of a gag, even more effectually than his hands; for while it deadened every sound which she attempted to make, it enabled her to breathe. Its odor, however, rather damaged its properties as a revivifying respirator, for it seemed compounded of stale, putrescent patchouli and the oldest and the dearest tobacco ash. Under ordinary circumstances, this unsavory scent was enough to have stifled her, or an elephant; but she was excited, and was frantically desirous to live and be set free from the ruffian who had seized her.

Floret, as Ida was seized, saw a dozen forms appear from beneath the undergrowth, and from leafy hollows, which did not appear to have contained a living creature. She perceived that the Daddy was accompanied by a tribe of his people, who were surrounding them, and she knew that escape, for the present, was hopeless.

A raw-boned, mahogany-visaged woman, wearing a bright amber handkerchief passed over her head and pinned beneath her chin, pushed some bushes aside, and moved up to the old man, who still kept the dress of Floret tightly in his grasp.

She laid her hand upon his shoulder, and, in a husky voice, said:

"What is it, old man-of-all?"

Floret glanced at her: it was not the gran-nam.

"The Vite Rose, my mulberry bud—the Vite Rose!" he ejaculated, in a tone of triumph.

The woman responded with an exulting cackle.

The Daddy said to one of the gipsies, who were all looking on at the two girls and the old man with wondering eyes:

"You 'ad better 'ark forward, Lurcher, right away at vonce. Draw them ere parter-idges vich you've got in your 'ands over the grass an' the bushes the werry percise vay as ve isn't goin'. Becos ve shall 'ave here in two-twas a

couple of young lords and a couple o' old keepers, who vill be locking ater this little brace o' game 'ere in muslin. I ain't partiklar about takin' that von you 'ave 'old on, Micah," he added; "but she might blow on us jest at first, so ve'll give her forty-eight 'ours o' gipsy life, jest to—"

"Hilloh! Hoy! hoy!" cried some voices, lustily.

The sounds were much nearer than before.

Floret started. She recognized the voice of the young Lord Victor—she knew its intonation perfectly. She was about to scream violently for aid, but she cast her eyes at her poor, worn, shabby garments, and, with a subdued groan of bitter pain, she remained silent.

She was in the Daddy's power now, but she believed that she would not always be. She had hopes that Liper Leper would not fail her, and that when she escaped from the clutches of the terrible old gipsy, who now held her fast, she should find some means to dress more becomingly, and be then enabled to meet Lord Victor in such attire that, at least, he would not say to himself, as he gazed upon her:

"She is a beggar!"

How many a poor girl has, alas! been ruined by such a reflection as this!

"Hilloh!" grunted the Daddy. "Werry pooty; that woo'hallo is werry pooty; but they'll find the fox stole away, I should say. Away, every von on you, inter brake and copse; inter holler an' dell; to earth with you; I'll take care on my Vite Rose—I'll take care on her. An' you, Micah, follow me vith that ere vite pigeon, vich is a flutterin' in your arms. Away vith you, the grass is 'ot, an' our shoes, at this ere partikler minnit, ain't so werry good. Away!"

As he concluded, the gipsies, of whom there were at least twenty, glided off silently in various directions.

The one who bore the more suggestive than euphonious name of Lurcher fulfilled the instructions given him by the Daddy, by drawing the feathered bodies of a brace of snared partridges along the tall grass, brushing with them, too, the tall, graceful, waving ferns, and the thorny, thickly-clustered, blooming gorse.

As they disappeared, the Daddy shifted, with great rapidity, one hand from Floret's cloak, and passed it round her waist.

She shrank from him, but he gripped her tightly, and, bending his wrinkled face toward hers, he placed his black lips close to her ear, and whispered, in what he intended to be a tender tone, but which had a whining, fawning character:

"My Vite Rose—my own little booty—my pooty Floret—don't shrink away from your poor old Daddy. You knows he's werry fond on you, an' he von't 'arm you. Perk up your pooty beak, an' chirrup, for there ain't no Grannem to wex you now, an' Daddy 'll make a queveen on you. Come along vith me, Vite Rose; it ain't o' no use a fightin' with thorns; you'll get the vust o' that, you knows; all



your poor little fingers 'll bleed, an' you vill still be stuck fast; so be cheerful and gay as a lark, as come villingly vith me, for you must come—you must come—you must—you must. Cos' I've sworn to lose my life, an' to take yourn—to take yourn, Floret—afore ve shall be tored asunder again—until— But never mind, vite dove; don't shrink an' tremble so; Daddy loves 'is silver snowdrop; he loves the werry star-eyed daisies, the goolden buttercup, the crystal chickweed, the amper-mouthed grund'ee, the crimson-spotted sorrel, the peachy vild anemony, the tiny tr'foil, an' the shivering doddle-grass upon vich her pooty little foot trips over, and never scrunches; he loves the soft summer vind vich blows vith spicy scent upon her little pinky cheek—not so werry pinky now, but it shall be; he loves the little birds as pipes to her; the leaves upon the trees, vich flutters as if they had the spasms as they chants to her; he loves everythin' a round her, a-bout her, a-bove her, beneath her, too vell—to vell—to 'urt a goolden thread of her silk-vorm 'air. So, come vith its fond old Daddy—come—come—come!"

All this while the Daddy, vith, it must be acknowledged, a gentle force, but still a force, urged her along. Ida, she perceived, had been already carried away, and she knew the nature of the people in whose power she was at that moment too well to hope to gain anything by struggling vith her captor. She was sufficiently well acquainted, too, vith the character of the Daddy to know that, if she attempted to shriek and struggle, that he would gag her, muffle her eyes, and carry her away at every risk of danger and injury to her, notwithstanding that he spoke to her vith such a velvet tongue.

So she went vith him, not villingly, but vith a reluctant dragging step, vich compelled him to propel her forward.

It was evident that he knew every inlet and outlet of the wood, for he traversed a devious path, unworn by human foot. Now between gorse bushes, and thick, matted, intertwined undergrowth; and, anon, between small lanes, formed by young saplings and trees of older growth.

And he paused not, during at least half an hour's hurrying, until they arrived at a glade of small dimensions, thickly screened by closely-clustering trees, between the stems of vich clambered up wild masses of hawthorn, interlaced vith the dog-rose, and decorated and trimmed, as it were, vith the blackberry and other brambles, vich were dense enough to hide from the eyes of all vithout those who reclined upon the lush grass vithin.

Here the whole of the tribe were assembled two tents were pitched upon the grass, an; preparations were being made to kindle a fire for the cooking of those provisions, vich some of the members of the community had collected during their morning rambles, vithout being the recipients of philanthropic gifts.

In a small heap in a corner were fresh-pulled potatoes and very young carrots; there

were some plucked pullets and one goose, whose feathers had been removed in haste and vithout care; there were also a brace of partridges and one pheasant. Some new-laid eggs, surreptitiously obtained from a nest in a farm-yard, peeped out from among the vegetables, and by their side were three loaves of new white, fancy bread, vich one of the men had "found" in a baker's basket, that stood "neglected and alone", outside the door of a villa. The frisky young baker had placed it vhere the gipsy had discovered it, vwhile he served his customer. He was, at the moment the gipsy "made a point" at the forsaken basket, vowing to the pretty housemaid, that she really had the sweetest and yet the cruellest of "hies", and a complexion vich made the best white wheaten flour, at tenpence a quatern, look like oatmeal; and she was chuckling and assuring him, as she gave his paste-colored chin a fillip, that he was a saucy and awdacious willeen, and was a leetle too full of his gammon.

And the price of that flirt was the three quatern loaves aforesaid.

There were several other articles collected there, all of usefulness and necessity, and the inference to be drawn from the gathering, obtained vithout incurring any other obligation than the law might impose, was, that the tribe intended remaining vhere they had pitched their tents for the remainder of that day and night, at least.

Floret knew this by vwhat she observed, and she hoped that this circumstance would afford her an opportunity of escaping once more from the Daddy's clutches. She had not, for a moment, despaired of help and aid, but she did not at present look for it, nor did she wish it to come from Lord Victor.

She was prepared to undergo, for a time, any trial, however severe, rather than appear before him in forlorn and poverty-stricken apparel.

No, she cast her eyes anxiously over every gipsy face vich was turned toward her vith a grave—not lowering—but earnest, curious expression.

The name of the White Rose was known to them as well as that of the greatest of their people, to vhom a tradition was attached; and they wondered, although they spoke not, vwhat the Daddy, now that he had it in his possession, would do vith his long-lost, deeply-grieved floweret.

Floret met their settled stare vith a firm but searching look, but her gaze rested upon the last nut-brown visage upon vich her eyes turned vith an expression of disappointment.

She had hoped to see the countenance of Liper Leper among those assembled, but he was not there.

In the meanwhile, the piercing shriek vich had been so abruptly and so shrilly uttered by Ida, was heard plainly, both by Lord Victor and his companion, Hyde Vaughan.

For an instant they were startled by it, but



Lord Victor impulsively placed his hand to his mouth, and responded by a loud shout; he followed it by the discharge of his fowling-piece, and the pointers who were with him broke into a loud baying.

"What the devil is the meaning of that cry?" exclaimed Hyde Vaughan, with a look of surprise, as much perhaps at Lord Victor's demonstration as at the scream itself. "Was it a woman's voice?"

"A girl's voice," responded Victor, quickly, with a frown on his brow. "Come along, Vaughan. I promise one ruffian, at least, a good trouncing."

As the words escaped his lips, he started forward at a swift pace in the direction from whence the shriek seemed to proceed.

"Hallo! where are you going, Victor?" cried Hyde Naughan.

"What a stupid question!" returned Victor, impatiently. "Come on, Vaughan! that was a girl's shriek of fright and horror, or I am no judge of the intonation of the human voice! Follow on, Charlton and Bates, with the dogs," he added, addressing the two keepers.

"Why, you don't mean to say that some rustic lout is misbehaving himself toward an unprotected girl," cried Hyde, shouldering his gun, and taking his place at the side of Victor, who was going at the "double".

"I have not a doubt of it," returned Victor. "I can tell you a strange story about the pool, near to which we heard that pretty song about the oranges."

"And did not see the singer?" suggested Hyde.

"Precisely," responded Victor. "I'll tell it you when we have leisure. It is a curious affair."

"A fairy pool, of course," remarked Hyde, beginning to pant.

"I have long since, in my own mind, called it by that name," responded Victor; "for the strangest—"

"Help! help!" shrieked from a distance an agonized voice, with yet shriller and more earnest tones than before.

Again Victor responded by a loud shout, and brought his thumb and finger to the lock and trigger of his gun.

Both his dogs barked loudly, and Hyde harked them forward. They bent their noses to the ground, and ran sniffing in a zig-zag direction.

Victor did not take heed of the animals, but kept on in the direction of the pool.

Another wild, despairing cry for help arose; he again responded, and, with knitted brows and set teeth, increased his pace.

They reached the pool at a run; but it was, to the mortification of Lord Victor, untenanted.

He halloed, but the wood only echoed his voice.

They all proceeded to beat about the bushes, but with no success. The dogs ran nosing round, and presently disappeared.

"Bruno has struck a scent," exclaimed the

keeper (Bates), touching his hat to Lord Victor; "shall we follow on, my Lord?"

"Ay, certainly; the dog's sagacity may lead us to the parties of whom we are in search," he replied, hastily; and, as he spoke, he forced his way through some undergrowth which grew thickly about the spot where the dogs had disappeared.

He was closely followed by Hyde Vaughan and the two keepers.

The dogs, which had been previously running to and fro a little wildly, now both went with a low murmur steadily in one direction.

"They have picked up a scent, my lord, for certain," exclaimed the keeper, Charlton; "but some birds have been in cover somewhere hereaway. It's not the game we are in search of, my lord."

"Very likely not—very probably not," returned Victor, pausing for a moment.

Then he placed his hand to his mouth, and cried, lustily:

"Hilloh!"

The cry was taken up at a not very distant part of the wood, and repeated.

They all at full speed dashed toward the spot whence the sound came.

It was not a woman's cry which had echoed Victor's call, but still it was a response, and they made toward the individual who had uttered it, hoping to obtain from him some explanation of the singular cries they had heard.

Victor called again, and again his call was replied to.

A minute more and they entered a glade, and saw, coolly leaning against a tree, a sturdy young fellow, whittling with a pocket-knife a hazel stick.

It was the rustic from whom Lord Victor had rescued Floret—the same who had much annoyed, and once insulted, Charlton's daughter.

His luck was unquestionably at this period of his existence out at elbows, for he not only turned up in their path at a moment when, in their estimation, his worth was at a very low ebb, but he grinned at them with evident feelings of exquisite enjoyment, having, as he considered, made fools of the whole party.

And his "ragged luck" unwisely urged him to be saucy.

The sight of his wide mouth, lined within by two tiers of well-developed but not finely-formed teeth, extended in an unequivocally derisive laugh, caused the blood of Lord Victor to boil in his veins.

He ran up, and said to him, fiercely:

"Was it you who halloed just now, in reply to my call?"

"Wor't yeou who called 'oot just now?" inquired the fellow, without looking up, and continuing to whittle his hazel stick.

"It was!" returned Lord Victor, sharply.

"Ecod, then twur I, too!" he responded, with a grin.

Why did you call out in answer to me?" asked Lord Victor, his anger rising rapidly up to the boiling point.



"Eh! why for did yeon call 'oot to me!" he replied, keeping up his grin.

Charlton sidled up to him, and said:

"You ugly cub, don't 'ee know who you be speakin' too!"

The fellow looked up at him and grinned.

"Ees," he returned, laconically.

"You ill-mannered calf!" cried Hyde Vaughan, indignantly. "Why don't you pay proper respect to—"

"Let him alone, Vaughan," interposed Lord Victor; "I'll teach him better manners presently."

"Will 'ee!" exclaimed the fellow, insolently; "will 'ee—ha! ha! Look 'ee, my feyther varms a hoon'dred yacres, an I beant no vagram—I beant. And you beant my measter, nor for that, my Lord Marquis neither, for I ha' left his sarvice. Nor more be yeon my measter," he added, with an impertinent scowl at Hyde Vaughan, which, but for Lord Victor, he would have resented. "An' I beant agoin' to touch my billycock, nor boo to every vool I meets as wants me too. There!"

Charlton, the gamekeeper, licked his lips, and went through the process of an imaginary mastication of the words which the uncouth rustic uttered, and he drew carefully through his hand the stout thong of the dog-whip which he carried.

Lord Victor, with much difficulty, preserved a dignified and haughty demeanor while the fellow was speaking; he bit his nether lip for a moment, and then said:

"Tell me, did you hear a young girl scream a few minutes back?"

"Ay, I did," he answered, with the same vacant laugh; "did yeon?"

"I am here to know the cause of that unhappy cry," replied Lord Victor. "Do you know what it was?"

"Loike enough I do," he returned, vigorously cutting a piece off the top of his stick, and slicing with it a not inconsiderable portion of the knuckle of his thumb.

This circumstance induced him to drop his stick, and leave off whittling. As his thumb bled fiercely, he put away his knife, and inserted his bleeding, dirty digit into his capacious mouth.

"What was the cause of that young girl's scream?" repeated Lord Victor, impatiently, as he drew up close to the rustic.

He was about to give a most insulting answer, but he was checked by the glitter of Lord Victor's eye—there was something dangerous in it—so he rejoined, doggedly:

"Giggies got 'old o' two girls, an' they've carried them off into wood."

"Did you see them?" inquired Lord Victor, sharply.

The rustic nodded his head sulkily.

"Did you not interfere to prevent the gipsies carrying off the two girls of whom you speak?" He grinned impudently.

"Not I!" he answered.

"Nor gave any alarm?" continued Lord Victor, fiercely.

"Noa!" shouted the rustic, in a rage, for his thumb had begun to smart and throb furiously, and his mouth was full of blood.

"Which way did they take?" asked Lord Victor, rapidly and eagerly.

"Go to Oold Nick!" cried the rustic, enragedly. "Sha'n't tell 'ee—foind oot for 'ee self!"

"You blackguard! a sound horse-whipping would seriously improve your complaint!" cried Hyde Vaughan, angrily.

The rustic perked up his face, and raised his clenched fist.

"I should like to see one as 'ood try to do't!" he cried, with a taunting grin. "I should varry much like to see 'un!"

"You scoundrel, you shall be favored with that gratification!" exclaimed Lord Victor, his face crimson with rage.

As he spoke, he snatched the dog-whip from the hand of Charlton, and, seizing the rustic by the neck piece, he lashed him most vigorously. The fellow leaped, and yelled, and roared, and begged for mercy.

"Let I goo—let I goo, measter! Oo! I beggee par-don! Yah—yah! I beggee—pardon! Yah! Marcy—marcy! Let I go—o-o-o! I'll go on bended knees to 'ee—let I goo! Oo! docee—doee! let I goo!"

When his arm ached with its active labor, Lord Victor released his hold of the fellow, and he bounded away like a deer, without saying a threatening word when he found himself at liberty, or even looking back.

Lord Victor drew breath, and muttered:

"That debt has been standing more than three years—I am glad I have paid it!"

"Paid it with principal and interest in full!" exclaimed Hyde Vaughan, who had been laughing until his sides ached, at the extraordinary antics which the insolent, ill-grained fellow had performed; and then he added: "What is to be done now, Victor? I am afraid we are at fault."

"No!" replied Victor, readily, "it is but a temporary check. I confess, I do not like the silence; it disturbs me more than even the screaming, because it implies desperate mischief. Bates, you run back to the house, and bring back with you my bloodhound, Hector; he will be sure to follow on my trail. You, Charlton, leash your dogs, and search the wood; blow your dog-whistle lustily, if you unkenel the gipsy party. You will accompany me, Vaughan, and we will take a different direction to that which Charlton selects. Away with you, Charlton—follow me, Vaughan! I feel sick at heart, and ready to do any rascal a serious mischief!"

As he concluded, he plunged into a narrow, leafy alley, closely followed by Hyde Vaughan, both wearing stern countenances, and clutching their guns firmly.

Charlton took a path well known to him, which he believed would certainly conduct him to the gipsies' lair.

Bates hurried back to the mansion, to return with Hector, the bloodhound!



## CHAPTER XIII.

"Let us be patient! These severe afflictions  
 Not from the ground arise,  
 But oftentimes celestial benedictions  
 Assume this dark disguise."

"We see but dimly through the mists and vapors;  
 Amid these earthly damps,  
 What seem to us but sad funereal tapers,  
 May be Heaven's distant lamps."

—RESIGNATION.

The Daddy—as Floret bent her lustrous but sorrowful eyes upon the swart faces of the members of his tribe, men and women—watched her from beneath his shaggy brows.

He noted the look of disappointment which stole over her features, and he mistook its meaning.

He perceived that she missed the presence of some person, and, strangely enough, he presumed that the missing person was the Grannam. He knew that Floret had detested her; yet he fancied that she looked for her hoping-ly among the fraternity there assembled, because she was known to her, and it would be some relief, in her unhappy position, to have some one near her whom she knew, and to whom she could speak almost without restraint.

He shook his head, and said to her, in a whining tone:

"'Ere's a werry pleasant an' a social party welcome you, Vite Rose. There ain't von on 'em as 'll look blue or wicious at you, acos they knows if they did, they'd rapidly come to a untimely end, as the Grannam did. You remembers the Grannam, Floret? Ah! she was very fond o' you, Vite Rose—hem!—though she didn't show it. An' you was werry partial to her, too—leastwise, I think so—though you didn't show it, nayther. Ah! women's quaveer things, they is! Ven they loves you werry much, they don't show it; and ven they don't love you, they don't—they do show it then. Yes; I'm afeard they do show it then! Yes—yes! The Grannam's gone, Floret. She fretted a'ter you, an' took too much rum. Jamaiker was her ruin. Though she used to say it vos her strength, I know'd it vos her weakness, an' so she found it. A'ter you'd gone away, an' I vos pinin' myself into the figger of a drummedary, the Grannam took to fallin' to a shadder, though her head vent on a swellin' until it reached a orful size. I vonce used to call her my p'ony, because she was round-faced and fresh-colored; but I vos at last obleeged to call her my poppy—my scarlet poppy; for the Jamaiker cropped up out of her cheeks. Ah! an' it vent on croppin' up, until her countynous grew 'zactly like a 'purple cabbage to pickles.' Then it was that, von night, havin' put away into her asmatial chest all the Jamaikers she could get 'old on, and still continoo-in' thusty, she vent, ve suppose, in search of a milder licker. Somehow, I didn't miss her that night; I vos uneesy in my mind about you, Vite Rose, and slept wery heavily; but, in the mornin', some von found her boots—Bal-me-ral boots, with slashing scarlet laces in 'em—leanin' agin the top edge of a rain-vater

butt; and she vos still in her boots, and her mouth vos down at the tap inside the butt, instead of being down at it outside the butt. She vos werry much soaked, cos the butt vos nearly full o' water; and astremely dead, becos the doctor couldn't bring her back to life. An' so, as she often used to say, it vos not the rum as killed her, but the vater. The Jamaiker toddled her up to the tub, p'raps, and the Jamaiker toppled her into the butt, but it vos the vater as killed her. Poor Grannam's gone dead! You von't never see her no more, Vite Rose—never no more!"

He paused, in order to let his words have due weight; but, we are bound to acknowledge that they had no effect upon Floret, or if they did, it was one which was rather cheering than otherwise. She perhaps would have preferred, if she had any inclination in the matter at all, that the Grannam had gone to her account in a decent and proper fashion, but that she was gone had a decided sort of relief to her, it is certain.

While these thoughts were revolving in her mind, one of the gipsies, a tall, muscular fellow, advanced to the Daddy, and said, in a low, husky voice:

"Shall we put the glimmer to the ruffmans, and set the pot agoin'?"

"Shall ve borrow a bell, or a gong, or a drum, and panjeen pipes, an' kick up a row, an' hooray; an' sing out, 'Ere's a Vite Rose—who wants a 'Vite Rose?'" responded the Daddy, sharply, between his teeth. "There's a little party on the 'unt for us now; you 'ave only to set them sticks in a blaze, an' up goes a pale-blue flag over the tree tops, to let them as is a 'unting for us know azackly vere to drop down on us like a thunder storm."

"Vot shali ve do then?" inquired the gipsy, gruffly.

"Nothen then, my bean-stalk," returned the Daddy, quickly, "but everythin' now. Strike the tents, divide the peckage, break up into twos an' threes; some'll go von way, some'll go another; nobody but me an' my pardner vill 'ave the Vite Rose, an' nobody vot ain't got the Vite Rose vill know anythin' about a Vite Rose! Do you understand?"

"All right, old-man-of-all," returned the gipsy, gruffly; "a leetle grub would be pleasant to the feelins-jis' now, but if ravens is about, we must 'ide the provender."

He turned away, and proceeded to the spot where the provisions lay clustered in a heap. The gipsies quickly thronged around him, to watch a just division of the spoils, and Floret, observing how they were engaged, said to the Daddy earnestly, in an undertone:

"Why have you seized upon me in such a lawless manner?—why do you seek to detain me? I am not what I was; you can see that I shall never be again what I have been. You must know that—why, therefore, do you abuse a power which you accidentally possess, and which cannot, in the course of nature, belong to you, to do me a wrong, who never did you an injury."



"Vild Rose—Vild Vite Rose—who said I would do you a wrong?" returned the Daddy, speaking with singular energy; "who said so? Whoever it was lied—lied, I say, lied; I love you, Vite Rose, an' I vill never wrong you—no, no—O no, Vite Rose—no, never."

"But you threatened me with murder a little while ago," she responded, emphatically.

"Only if you tried to bolt from me, that was all," he said, resuming his whining tone; "I cannot live without you—I vill not live without you, and you shall not live without me."

"To what good?" rejoined Floret; "I am changed since we were parted; I was a child then—I am a woman now—at least I have a woman's feelings; trouble, trial, sorrow, an inward misery, which has no voice, have made me leap from childhood to womanhood; I have had no girlhood. When I left you, I was ignorant—I am now educated—I can be, therefore, of no value to you."

"My Vite Rose is troubled with an error," he replied, promptly, "a very serous error: ven you vos a little child, a fair-haired, vite-faced—the Lord! your face is vite enough now—a vite faced little snowdrop you vos a little goold-mine to me; ven you vos a p'imrose, a cowlip, a yellow heart-ease, you vos still a goold-mine to me. You know how your pooty little fingers made me the bootifoolest bow-pots, an' how goolden surreigns was given to you for a penny bunch o' wilets; vasn't you a goold-mine to me then? You'll be von to me again."

"How?" she inquired, sternly, looking strangely like the Marchioness of Westchester in some of her moods, when she put that question.

The Daddy leered cunningly at her.

"Does the Vite Rose know who placed her in my care?" he asked.

"I was stolen from—from—Mamma Atten," returned Floret, passing her hand thoughtfully across her brow.

"Ay, p'raps, werry likely," he returned, quickly, "but not by Daddy; no, Daddy received you almos'; a babby from them as know'd who you are."

She clutched him by the arm, and gazed in his face with intense eagerness, he spoke so emphatically.

"P'raps," he continued, "I knows who you are, p'raps I don't; but vot I does know is, there's money hanging to you, suv'ins drip-pin' from your fair locks, from your tongue, your lips, your cloak, your feet—goold, goold, goold, vaitin' for me to pick it up. 'Pardner,' I've said to myself in the still night, ven the stars've shono out in the clear, dark sky Mke d'mands on a purple welwet curting, 'pardner, 'ere is all this goold a layin' about neglected, vaitin' for you an' I to pick it up, a raal Tom Tidler's ground, sparkling and glittering like a spangled veskit, an' shall ve vile ve lives let it wanish from our eyes, and from our fingers—pardner, athout a desperst struggle. Nol An' if ve loses it, if ve loses it, vot vill life be vorth a'terwards—vot vill the world be vorth, not

livin' for, sure-ly. No, an' so if ve can't 'ave it, pardner, ve'll die over it—ve'll die over it—but the goolden rose shall die over it, too—she shall die over it, too—for if ve makes no goold out on her, nobody else shall—no, no; nobody else shall."

While the last words were yet upon his lips, a large bloodhound, with a low but terrible growl, crashed through the briars and hawthorn bushes, and bounded into the open space.

With a wild and terrified yell, the gipsy women sprang to their feet. The men, who were huddled together, snarling over the division of the provisions, rose up, too; and the tall, bony fellow who had a few minutes previously addressed the Daddy, seized up a stout stick, and made a fierce blow at the huge animal, as with glaring and inflamed eyes he stood, panting and looking about him, as if undecided which of the tribe he should select to worry.

The dog, on seeing the blow directed at him, sprang nimbly on one side, and in another instant he was up at the gipsy's throat, crunching with his teeth the man's collar and neck-cloth.

The man shouted with fright, and the women screamed with horror. Not one of the gipsies dared assail the dog, although he was fully occupied with his attack upon their comrade. They, however, after their first gestures of terrified surprise, caught up sticks and tent-poles, and were about to attempt to beat him off their companion, who had fallen to the ground, when a fresh incident drew their attention.

Through the opening in the glade by which the Daddy had conducted Floret, came hurriedly Lord Victor and Hyde Vaughan, followed by the two gamekeepers, Charlton and Bates.

A low, malignant howl was raised by the gipsies, and each one of the men drew a knife, or some such weapon, as if they expected a fierce conflict to ensue, and were determined to be prepared for it.

The moment Lord Victor saw Floret, he recognized her, though his expanded eyes and elevated eyebrows betrayed that he was not a little surprised by the alteration which had taken place in her appearance.

The expression of his eyes betrayed, too, that admiration was blended with that surprise, and as well that he felt inwardly delighted, not only that he had succeeded in discovering her, but that he should, in all probability, prove the instrument of her deliverance.

Without noticing the deadly combat which was going on upon the grass, between his dog Hector and the prostrate gipsy, he advanced hastily toward Floret; but with a screeching yell, the Daddy threw himself between her and Lord Victor, and brandishing a knife, he cried at the top of his voice:

"Stay vere you are, stay vere you are, or I'll plunge this pisoned knife in her 'art!—I vill, I vill!"



Floret screamed and wrung her hands. She waved Victor back excitedly.

"Do not approach me," she cried, vehemently; "you will cause my death if you do!"

She knew the Daddy's nature only too well. She knew that she was standing upon the very brink of certain destruction, and that if she allowed Lord Victor to take another step nearer her, her life would not be worth another moment's purchase.

He paused with a look of amazement, and at the same moment, a chorus of voices addressed him:

"Call off your dog, he's murdering the man—call him off!"

The gipsies seemed to know instinctively that the dog belonged to the young lord.

He glanced for an instant sternly round him at the gloomy, scowling men, and then at the pale Floret and the affrighted Ida, who, in her fear, was actually clinging to a rough gipsy, while her eyes were bent in terror upon the huge bloodhound, which still pined the powerful gipsy to the turf, in spite of his tremendous struggles to release himself.

He then stepped to Bates, who carried a spring collar, to which a massive steel chain was attached, and taking it from him, he went up to his dog, passed the collar swiftly round his neck, took a firm hold of the chain, and shouting a few words—which the animal not only recognized, but immediately obeyed—he drew him away, and the gipsy sprang to his feet.

Infuriated with rage, he drew out a knife, and would have made a rush at the dog; but two of his companions withheld him, Lord Victor, in a loud voice, warned him back, and Hyde Vaughan presented a double-barreled gun full at his head.

For a moment he saw not, with his inflamed eyes, these demonstrations, but his inability to escape from the strong grasp of the men who held him, and the closing round of several of the women of the tribe, brought him back to something like a comprehension that it would be best for the moment to remain quiet.

Within a few minutes more, a little order was restored, and then Lord Victor, waving his hand with a gesture of haughty dignity, he exclaimed, in a loud, authoritative voice:

"Hear me, gipsies!"

As if awed by his manner, as well as by his truly lordly appearance, though so young in years, every murmur was in a moment hushed by the clustering throng.

Lord Victor took a step toward the Daddy, and gazing at him sternly, said:

"I must speak to the young lady whose wrist you are clutching, and whose life you are menacing with your knife."

"You may speak," grunted the Daddy, slowly; "you may speak to her there where you stand, but not an inch nigher—not a spider's thread nigher. There must be no touching of hands. No, no; she is mine, an' I will not part with her while she lives. My hand will be quicker than your foot. She

dies if you draw nigher; if I even die, too, the moment arter—I care naught about that!"

"I hold such threats in scorn!" exclaimed Lord Victor, curling his lip. "With one bound, if I willed it, I could cast you to the earth before you could lift your hand to attempt the accursed deed you threaten."

"In the name of Heaven remain where you are!" exclaimed Floret, agitatedly; "the knife is tipped with a subtle, venomous, and deadly poison. Were you to attempt to rescue me, you would only sacrifice your own life without saving mine."

"That's it—that's it, Vite Rose," cried the Daddy, quickly. "I loves you, an' I won't 'arm you if they leaves us alone; but if they do interfere atween us, I'll kill any vone as tries it on, as well as you."

"What does all this mean?" exclaimed Lord Victor, with a bewildered look at Floret. "We have met before, as you know. I am acquainted with some portion of your history—that also you know, I am also cognizant of the fact that the lady who received you in her house, and who caused you, when you were extremely ill of a fever, to be placed at a cottage at Reigate, has been searching for you ever since you disappeared, and that she is most anxious to meet with you. I am prepared, in spite of what this old ruffian threatens, to take you to her at this moment."

"Are you—are you?" cried the Daddy; "but I isn't prepared to let her go."

As he concluded, he uttered rapidly several sentences in a gibberish, or Romany dialect, which the gipsies promptly comprehended.

Lord Victor looked suspiciously at him, but as the gipsies all remained motionless, he continued to address Floret.

"You need not heed, nor need you fear the jargon which this wretched man utters," he said. "I will protect you; I have the means at hand, and I have the power. You may safely trust yourself with me. I will conduct you promptly to the lady to whom I have alluded, or anywhere else you may wish to be conveyed."

"You are verry good, but it ain't goin' to be done!" exclaimed the Daddy, between his teeth. "Floret knows me pooty vell. She knows that her spirit vould be in kingdom afore you could vink a neye-lash. She knows the gipsy people and their ways afore to-day—say so, Floret. I don't tie your tongue, Vite Rose, not I; say vot you please, but you know speaks vot is true."

I Floret once more wrung her hands. She drew a deep breath, and with a strangely-meaning look into Victor's eyes, she said:

"Beware!"

Then she rapidly added:

"I have to ask of you as a favor to leave me to my fate. I shall come to no harm with this old man, and I must work out my deliverance myself—alone, unaided. It is my destiny. We may meet again, Lord Victor, in—in"—her voice trembled, and some unbidden tears sprang into her eyes, but she made an effort,



and checked her emotion—"in brighter, happier times—at least, such to me. If that time should ever come, I shall know how to thank you for your generous and brave interference in my favor to-day. But there stands a young lady, who has been my companion in some affliction and some sore trials; these people have no wish to detain her, and if you will, my lord, conduct her to the lady of whom you have spoken, and entreat her to befriend her, I will pray for you while I live."

"I will take charge of that young lady!" exclaimed Hyde Vaughan, who had been gazing upon Ida with wondering and admiring eyes for some minutes previously. "She shall go to my mother and sister. She will come to no grief in my custody, I will vow."

"No, no, no!" cried Ida, excitedly. "I will not leave you, Edith. I will—"

But her voice was suddenly drowned in a wild and frantic Indian-like yell, which emanated from the women of the tribe. Like a band of infuriated demons, they sprang with one accord upon Lord Victor, Hyde, and the two gamekeepers, and forced them to the ground, before they were in any degree able to resist. The men joined them immediately afterward in the attack, and, almost as soon as we have taken to describe it, Lord Victor and his companions were made captive, bound hand and foot, and gagged.

The dog Hector, hampered by collar and chain, was pounced upon, and in an instant his throat was ruthlessly slit from ear to ear. The guns were taken away by the gipsies, and hidden beneath the hawthorn bushes and in gullies, a short distance from the glade. The whole of the provisions and tents were then scrambled up, and the gipsies, dividing into parties, straggled hastily away in various directions.

The Daddy, attended by a woman and two men, hurried off with Floret and Ida, both of whom he had previously caused to be gagged. And there remained in the glade, within a few minutes after this onslaught had commenced, only Lord Victor, his friend, and the two gamekeepers, stretched upon the grass, bound and helpless.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

"'Tis true, they are a lawless brood,  
But rough in form, nor mild in mood;  
'And every creed, and every race,  
With them hath found—may find a place;  
But open speech and ready hand,  
Obedience to their chief's command;  
'A soul for every enterprise,  
That never sees with terror's eyes;  
Friendship for each and faith to all,  
'And vengeance vow'd for those who fall  
Have made them fitting instruments  
Far more than e'en my own intents."

—THE BRIDE OF ABYDOS.

After many days and nights of travel, by by-paths, through forests and moors, the gipsies came to a resting-place.

They had now reached the centre of England, and arrived at a spot which might be termed the gipsies' home. Here dwelt the king of the gipsies; here the oldest and most

influential men and women of the various tribes either resided or visited; and here the young and the sturdy of both sexes came to be married, or to perform, or to be initiated into, some of those mystic rites, which are peculiar to, and pertain alone to the gipsy race.

Among the community who lived here the Daddy was a patriarch and a chief; he had considerable influence, and was well versed in the regulations and laws by which the people were, it may be said, self-governed. Much deference was paid to what fell from his lips, and almost implicit obedience to his commands.

Arrived here safely, he conducted his "treasure" and her companion to a picturesque locality, a grassy arena, encompassed by trees, some at least a century's growth, and others yet more aged. A considerable throng of the gipsy fraternity were here assembled—old and young, men, women, boys, and girls. They had formed an irregular circle, and it was evident, by their attention to some object who was within the reserved space, that some proceeding of importance to their community was taking place.

The Daddy looked on the assemblage with an eye of misgiving, but he pressed forward, dragging, rather than leading, Floret. Ida clung to her companion's robe, and the Daddy, elbowing his way among a part of those individuals who formed a portion of the human ring, the three were quickly within the limits of the prescribed circle.

The Gipsy King, a white-haired, shriveled old man, who looked all bandana handkerchief and boots, was seated on a grassy hillock, which was his throne. He, as well as the surrounding throng, was listening to an old woman, who, with theatrical gesticulations, was haranguing the King, and constantly appealing to the people.

The Daddy bent his eye upon her, and he grinned savagely. He glanced at Floret, and put his hand into the pocket of his velvet jacket, where, lying loosely, was his knife with the envenomed blade. He gripped the handle malignantly, and gulped twice or thrice very suggestively; but he stood perfectly still, keeping his keen, brilliant black eye bent upon the woman who was speaking.

She was a strange, weird-looking creature, evidently very old, for her face was of the hue of a dingy-yellow morocco leather, and was drawn into puckers; but it was palpable that she retained very much wiry strength, vigor, and energy.

Her form was lean and bony, but she stood very upright. She wore, folded over her head and pinned beneath her chin, a kerchief of scarlet silk. It shrouded from sight all but her wrinkled, walnut-stained visage, and her eyes, black as night.

About her shoulders and neck was another handkerchief, of a brilliant yellow, crimson-spotted, and beneath it a short kirtle of amber worsted stuff, adorned with black stars, which reached to the tops of a pair of coarse but well-fitting leather boots, laced up the centre.



She commanded, it was apparent, the respectful attention, not only of the people who were spread around her, but of the monarch of the tribe, for he several times waved his hand approvingly when she advanced a proposition with more than usual force.

As the Daddy entered the arena with Floret, she had just concluded an observation which had elicited from her auditors murmurs of applause; but the very instant the scores of flashing black eyes glittering round the circle turned upon the Daddy, those murmurs were promptly hushed, and each man and woman exchanged significant looks with his or her neighbor.

This sudden silence attracted the attention of the old woman who had been speaking. She turned her head toward the Daddy, and, as she perceived him, and with him two young, fair, shrinking girls, a lurid gleam shot from her star-like eyes, and with a wild smile, she cried, in an elevated tone, with piercing clearness:

"He is here! In his hand he holds the White Rose!"

A curious low murmur ran through the assembly.

The old King rose up, shaded his eyes with both hands, peered at the Daddy and his companions for a minute, and then slowly resumed his seat again.

The Daddy looked for a minute fixedly and searchingly at the King, and then he slowly turned his eyes upon the grim, gaunt old gipsy woman.

She had faced toward him; her right arm was down, and her hand was clenched; her left hand she rested upon her hip.

Her attitude was one of quiet but determined defiance and hostility.

The Daddy scowled at her; his skin changed to a pale, repulsive green; his jaws wagged quickly together, and he growled as a mastiff does before it gives an angry bark.

"Eloia of Castile," he muttered, "Hagar's old ancient aunt—I sees the game! O, but—O, but—"

His voice seemed to be lost in an effort which he made to keep himself from choking.

He drew his knife secretly from his pocket, and turned the blade up his sleeve, keeping the handle hidden in his hand.

He tightened his hold of Floret, and he made one or two attempts to clear his voice, and then said, lustily though huskily:

"Great Tawney Prince—I, Daddy Windy, Maunder and Patrico, am here! I bring with me the Vite Rose; my Vite Rose, Tawney Prince—my Vite Rose! Mine—mine—on'y mine, as I shall prove to you, Rum Duke and High Pater, venever you shall magniminiously and gra-shus-ly gi' me the chance o' doin' on it!"

The old gipsy seated upon the mound, whom he had addressed as "Great Tawney Prince", raised his semi-bald, grizzled, and dingy head, and looked hard at him beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

Presently he said, in a mumbling and not too audible tone:

"Vieh is the Vite Rose?"

The Daddy moved a few paces forward in his direction, compelling Floret—who, with a half-abashed, half-indignant air, hung back—to accompany him.

Pointing to her, he said, in a strange tone, which seemed to challenge all consequences which might follow the acknowledgment:

"Be'old the Vild Vite Rose!"

An eager, whisper ran round the assemblage, and every eye there was fastened upon Floret—even that of the aged "Tawney Prince".

After a brief inspection of her face and form he uttered a kind of grunt, and pointing to Ida, exclaimed:

"Who's t'other?"

"I found her along with the Vite Rose," answered the Daddy; "an' I let her come with us, acos the Vite Rose wished it."

"She is a house-dweller?" observed the monarch, interrogatively.

"In her nat'ral state, cert'n'y," responded the Daddy.

"Born such—bred such—desires to die such?" continued the monarch.

"Ain't a doubt on't," returned the Daddy. "I knows nothing about her, 'cept vot I've told you."

"You have done wrong to bring her here; she must be driven away!" exclaimed the King, in a harsh and angry tone.

"Vith all my 'art," returned the Daddy, with a grin.

"No! no! no!" exclaimed Floret, hastily.

"Be silent, Vite Rose!" exclaimed the Daddy, between his teeth. "Don't say a vord, 'cept vot I bids you, if you wouldn't have fresh grass growin' and a blowin' over your head ven the stars peep out."

Raising his voice, he continued:

"I didn't vant to bring her; I vowed she shouldn't come! But the Vite Rose and she vagged their tongues agin me both at wonce. An' vot can von poor old man do agen the tongues of two women, ven they vork together with a strong vill?"

A laugh went round the assembly.

"I don't vant to keep her—I don't mean to keep her!" continued the Daddy. "She ain't no use to me—she von't be no use to me! She's followed me 'ome here, like a strange cur, an' I don't vant to give her 'ouse room!"

"Drive her forth!" cried the Gipsy King, waving his hand with an imperious and impatient movement.

"Drive her forth!" yelled a dozen voices; and several gipsy girls and men advanced menacingly toward her.

With a cry of fright, Ida rushed to Floret, and, throwing her arms round her, clung to her.

"Do not let these horrible people drive me away from you, Edith!" she exclaimed, in tones of distress.



The Daddy seized hold of her, and, with abrupt violence, tore her away from Floret. He thrust her rudely back, so that she staggered and nearly fell.

"Go away—be off with you!" he cried, in harsh, savage accents. "Get out! Ve don't van't nothen' to do with you no more—go!"

A loud, shrill hoot burst from the gipsy women, and they moved up to the poor, horrified girl, with threatening gestures.

Floret started at the alarming sound, but it had not the effect of dismaying her—on the contrary, it seemed to rouse at once her dormant energies into energetic action.

The Daddy had, after pushing Ida back, once more laid hold of her wrist; but, with one twist, she wrenched herself from him, and darting up to Ida, she caught her round the waist with one arm, and, drawing herself proudly and firmly up, she waved the gipsies back.

"She shall remain with me!" she cried, with a haughty dignity, and a glance of lofty scorn at the people who were pressing upon her; "or we will quit this hateful place together!"

"No—no! You don't quit no place without me!" cried the Daddy, with a snarl, as he ran up and made an attempt to seize her once more.

She thrust him back, with a strength which her roused spirit alone could have given her; and, hastily placing her hand in her bosom, she drew forth her poniard, and, grasping the hilt firmly, she cried, with passionate energy, as she held it menacingly at the Daddy:

"Stay where you are: this blade has, too, a poisoned point! Liper Leper gave it to me, and told me that it was venom-dipped—he would not have said that falsely to me! Do not move a step nearer to me, or you, who have threatened me with death, shall receive your death at my hands! You are driving me mad! I will go with you no more! I will die first! You shall not drive this poor, bruised creature from me. We will remain together, or we will die together! A scratch—a touch—is death! Aha—aha! You—you—you have told me that!"

Floret enunciated these words with vehement rapidity, but with a clearness and sharpness of tone, which rendered every word she said audible to those even at a distance, and her knitted brows, her flashing eyes, her flushed cheek, and her lip curling with scorn and indignation, expressed a determination, which assured the Daddy, at least, that she would keep her word if he attempted to seize her again.

It seemed a little matter to spring upon her and wrest that dagger from her, but the Daddy was an experienced and cautious old man; he knew that even young girls possess considerable strength when their anger is aroused and they mean mischief, and he was aware, too, that the simplest scratch, as Floret suggested, accidentally received in a tussle, from the weapon she held in her hand, would place him in a condition to have fresh grass "a growin'

and a blowin'" over his head when the stars were peeping out.

He therefore followed her counsel, and remained where he was, looking for a favorable opportunity to dash upon her, secure her weapon, and, with it, her, too.

The gipsy woman and young men, when they saw the antique poniard, and heard that Liper Leper was the donor of it, drew back, with a peculiar promptitude, which betrayed their appreciation of the properties which the little dagger possessed, and awaited events.

The poniard had a character. They were not anxious to trust themselves within its unfriendly reach.

Ida clung shiveringly to Floret, and whispered:

"Do not let them separate us, Edith. I do not fear to die, but do not let us be parted, unless by death."

Floret pressed her to her bosom, but her attention was so fastened upon the Daddy, that she could not trust herself to speak.

She knew his treacherous cunning, and his promptness for action when opportunities, for which he was looking, presented themselves; she had eyes, therefore, for no one but him.

Not even to observe approach her a young and strikingly handsome man, but a gipsy, who was better dressed and far more attractive in appearance than any of the tribe there.

"Floret!" he ejaculated, in a soft, almost plaintive tone.

At the sound of his voice, she turned her head like lightning toward him.

"Liper Leper!" she cried.

"Liper Leper!" at the same moment ejaculated the Daddy, changing from a pale saffron to a livid gangrene hue.

Liper Leper, for it was he, without seeming to heed the amazement of either, said to Floret, rapidly:

"A few words now; a conference anen. Your friend must depart hence; even, as for a time, you must remain here. You will trust her with me? I will treat her as gently and as respectfully as I would—even you. Persuade her to leave you, and quickly, too. If ever you placed faith in me, Floret, you may now."

Floret kissed Ida on the forehead.

"Go with him, dear Ida," she exclaimed. "You will be far safer with him than with me."

Ida looked at her affrightedly, and then at Liper Leper. She had heard his words, and his looks reassured her.

"We shall be reunited?" she exclaimed, inquiringly, as she turned her eyes upon his.

"You shall!" replied Liper Leper, emphatically, though laconically.

Ida threw her arms about Floret's neck, and kissed her passionately; then she placed her hand in Liper Leper's, and he led her away.

Floret gazed after her with a swelling heart, as she saw her move quickly away. She saw her turn her face over her shoulder as she went, and kiss her hand to her.



She brushed away a tear that obtruded itself upon her eyelid, and stole down her cheek; for, as Ida disappeared, a feeling of bitter loneliness took possession of her, and this was the moment that the old Daddy selected to spring upon her like a wild-cat, with the intention of wresting the poniard from her, and make her once again his captive.

But as he was on the eve of making his spring, he was suddenly seized from behind by a couple of tall, stalwart, wiry gipsies, who each took a firm hold of the collar of his coat and of his wrists, and held him motionless, as if he was in a vice.

A few futile attempts to struggle told him that all endeavors to release himself by force from the men who held him would be hopeless; and he gave up, and addressed himself to the task of ascertaining what was to follow this, to him, most extraordinary proceeding.

To his dismay, he beheld Hagar Lot picturesquely attired in the dress of a Gitana—a long, dark-blue cloth cloak descending to her heels, advancing toward Floret slowly, and with a measured pace.

By her side walked Elcia of Castile, her aunt, who moved with the same step.

Hagar took the right hand of Floret, Elcia the left.

Hagar turned her lustrous black eyes upon Floret with a strange look, which partook more of marvel than of mere curious scrutiny.

Whatever were her impressions, however, she confined them within her own breast, and said, laconically;

"Come with me, and fear not."

Floret glanced at her, and though she was differently attired, and three eventful years had wrought a change in her face, she recognized her. It was she who had placed her with the Misses Blixenfinik; but it was she, also, who had rescued her from the Daddy, after he had seized her at Reigate, and who had promised that she should never have cause to fear him more.

She was present now, doubtless, to withdraw her from his hands, and she, therefore, opposed no objection to her request.

She permitted her and her old gipsy aunt to retain her hands, and she walked between them to the foot of the simple throne of the Gipsy King.

The men who had firm hold of the Daddy also moved with their prisoner to the same place; and the gipsies, who were circled round, in their anxiety to see and hear all that passed, drew up closer, too.

When the former paused within a few feet of the king, the old monarch looked into the face of Hagar, and, for more than a minute, he never removed his eyes from her countenance. It was as though he was not only examining with care every feature she possessed, but as if he was penetrating below their surface to those depths which would reveal to him what was passing in her mind.

Slowly, at last, he removed his gaze from her, and fastened it upon Floret's face; but for a few seconds only.

"A fount pure and un'pluted," he muttered.

He next turned his eyes upon the Daddy's excited countenance, and a marked change passed rapidly over his features. He mumbled a few words, which were not audible. Then he turned again to Floret, and, addressing her in a softer and kinder tone than she had expected, he said:

"You are the Vild Vite Rose? Speak—don't be afraid, child—answer me!"

"I have been so called by the Daddy, she returned, in a low tone, pointing to him.

"You know the Daddy?" interrogated the King.

She shuddered slightly, and said, in the same kind of undertone:

"I do."

"And you knows this young 'ooman, too?" he continued, pointing to Hagar.

"I have seen her before to-day," she replied, hesitatingly, unknowing really what to answer.

"Werry good!" exclaimed the King; "werry good!"

Then glancing at Hagar and at the Daddy, he said, interrogatively

"You both on you claims her?"

"I do, unhesitatingly!" exclaimed Hagar.

"The Daddy has no claim to her whatever! If he has, let him prove it now! If he does so to your satisfaction, O Tawney Prince! I will resign her to him without a murmur, and never seek more to disturb him in his right to detain her in his custody!"

"She is mine! mine! mine!" cried the Daddy, with quivering jaws.

The King turned his head slowly to him, and he said:

"Daddy Windy, Maunder and Patrico, do you remember your oath to me?"

"Vot oath?" inquired the Daddy, sharply.

A strange, shrill laugh burst from the lips of the aged King: It was more like the howl of a hyena than a human laugh.

The old man tossed up his hands in the air, and, addressing the gipsies, cried shrilly:

"Crank cuffs! Ven I axes the Patrico if he remembers his oath to me, he axes me vot oath?"

A low murmur of derisive laughter ran round the assemblage.

The Daddy felt his hair shoot out straight, like stalactites, his blood prick and tingle, and cold drops of perspiration creep down his back, making his flesh crawl.

He was too experienced not to see that the King and the whole fraternity were excited against him, and he surmised that this feeling might proceed far enough to rob him of the White Rose.

But not without murder!

Wholesale murder, if it were necessary; but, to a surety, the murder of the White Rose!

These feelings and thoughts, with many others occupied but a second, for, assuming the cringing manner he had so often adopted to Floret, he said, in a fawning tone:



O! Tawney Prince, does you mean the oath of legence vich I, along of all the rest o' the canters and cuffs, took ven you vos 'lected king over us all?"

His Majesty, who sat all of a heap, with his royal chin subsiding to the depths of his loose, blue-spotted handkerchief, grunted his assent.

"I does, then," responded the Daddy, promptly; "every vord on it!"

The King started up to his feet. His movement had an electrical effect upon the spectators. He gazed fiercely on the Daddy, and said, in a harsh, guttural voice:

"Kneel, Patrico, and repeat that oath!"

He turned to the assemblage, and cried—

"Silence, all on you! Listen to the Patrico!"

Instantly the hubbub was hushed, and the moaning of the wind, as it swept, soughing through the swaying branches, and fretting the restless leaves of the old trees, was the only sound heard.

## CHAPTER XV.

"Slowly the silence of the multitudes Pass'd, as when far is heard in some lone dell The gathering of a wind among the woods— And he is fallen! they cry; he who did dwell Like famine, or the plague, or aught more fell, Among our homes, is fallen; the murderer Who slaked his thirsting soul as from a well Of blood and tears with ruin! He is here! Sunk in a gulf of scorn from which none may him rear! —THE REVOLT OF ISLAM.

Among the gipsy fraternity, the renewal, or rather ratification, of an oath of allegiance was a very unusual circumstance. In the instances in which it did occur, and they were very rare, the individual who was compelled to go through the ceremony was suspected of intending defection, or a design to get himself placed in the seat of honor occupied by the ruling Tawney Prince.

Now, as the Daddy was quite convinced that he neither contemplated defection nor the usurpation of the throne, he could not comprehend why his loyalty should be doubted. An uneasy suspicion that his quarrel with Hagar Lot was at the bottom of it all, stole through his brain; but he consoled himself with the belief, that if his surmise should prove to be truth, he had greater influence on the fraternity, and even with the monarch himself, than she had, and that he should prevail when the claims of both to the White Rose, and the origin of their dispute, came to be discussed.

So, when the two muscular gipsies, who yet held him in their grip, released their hold, he slowly bent his old legs, and sunk upon his knees before the Tawney Prince.

Then he said, in a husky, but yet loud and rather high-pitched voice:

"I, Carkas Cooper, but by my baptized name, Daddy Windy, a gipsy born, gipsy bred, Maunder and Patrico of my tribe, do here, upon my knees, on the green grass vich some day shall kiver my breast, beneath the broad sky, without a cloud or vith a cloud, in

the sunshine or the shadow, ven the stars are sleeping, place my palms to thy palms, O Tawney Prince, and by the Great All Powerful and celestial spirit, Baal, I swear!"

The King rose up slowly, and with him the Daddy, still keeping the palms of his hands resting upon those of the King's.

There was a slight movement among the people, but it was only made with the object of catching every word he uttered.

The Daddy then went on to say:

"I, as a Crank Cuffin, vill be a true brother vile the breath o' life continues in my body. I vill in all things—"

"In all things!" iterated the King, with emphasis.

"In all things," repeated the Daddy, in a somewhat fainter tone. "obey the commands of the great Tawney Prince. I vill keep his counsel, and foller it; and I vill not divulge secrets, nor those o' the bruthrin."

"Ugh!" grunted the King.

"I vill not," continued the Daddy, "at no time, an' for no cause, an' under no consideration, nor temptation votsomdever, leave, quit, or forsake the fraternity in vich I vos born, to vich I belong, and in vich I hope to die. I vill obey all orders sent to me by my Prince, through a lawful Cuffin, an' observe an' keep all appointments vensoever an' veresover made, vether it be in the starlight, or in the sunlight, in any place, if vithin the reach of a four-legged prad or shanks' ten-toed trotter.

"I vill never disclose, nor vill I teach our secret mysteries to any von out of kingdom come, unless it be to a true an' regularly admitted an' sworn Cuffin an' brother.

"I vill take my Prince's part agin all the world. I vill not myself abuse nor deceive him, nor vill I suffer any other, from an abram to a curtal livin', to do so likewise; but I vill defend him and every true brother, to the best of my ability, against all outliers votever, taking or making no 'ception.

"An' lastly. I vill never myself, nor vill I aid any von else, indweller or outlier, to oppose him, his vill, or his vord, his laws, or the laws vich have been made for the good an' wholesome governin' on us all."

This strange affirmation the Daddy ratified by an oath of a very formidable character, which it is not necessary here to repeat.

When he ceased, the King tossed up his hands, and bade him stand back on the same spot from which he had advanced to kneel to him.

The Daddy obeyed him, with an aspect in which there lurked a great amount of misgiving.

When he had approached the gipsy King to kneel before him, he had dexterously returned his knife to his coat-pocket; and now, as he glanced at Hagar, he thought of it, with a sensation of devilish malignity.

The King called Hagar Lot to stand forth.

She quitted the side of the ancient woman, Elcia of Castille, and with a slow and stately step approached him.



When within a few feet of him, she paused, and drawing her figure erect, she folded her arms, and gazed steadfastly and sternly upon him.

He returned her fixed gaze with one equally steadfast, and he said, laconically, but emphatically:

"Speak!"

"There is a law, O Tawney Prince, in force among our people," she commenced, in a slow, but clear and marked tone, "which gives to her charge solely the child whom she may have received from those who disdain or fear to acknowledge it as their own to the world. As she receives it, so she has the right to exercise an exclusive control over it, as long as she pleases, or until, having married, it becomes the property of another."

"That is so," rejoined the king.

Hagar pointed to Floret.

"This girl—the nameless, the homeless, the outcast—was consigned to me by the only being living who had the power of doing so. I took the bird from its nest, and upon myself the responsibility of its support. I dared not bring it to the tribe, for suspicion would have fallen upon them; and if it had been known that it was concealed among our people, you would all have been hunted through the land. As it was, those who have traversed Kent know how much of suffering, of insult, of trouble, the name of the Poor Girl has caused them."

A murmur of assent ran through the assembly, and for the moment arrested her speech. As it subsided, she went on:

"To save our people from being hunted like foxes from covert to covert, I placed her with the Daddy, warning him that I should claim her from him some day. Accepting a sum of money, and a promise of more, he consented to receive her on my conditions. Years of suffering and sorrow to me passed away, but the time arrived when it became necessary that I should claim her. I did so. The Daddy, violating his agreement, refused to restore her to me—he even threatened me with a scratch of a poisoned knife if I attempted to take her away from him. I was compelled to resort to stratagem to regain her; and, having succeeded, I placed her where she became the mistress of book-love, and those accomplishments which lady house-dwellers delight in. From this place she fled, and fell into the Daddy's way. He has again seized her, and I demand her from him, having alone that claim to her which our laws sustain, and which our people respect."

The King, who had listened to Hagar with undivided attention, turned slowly to the Daddy, and exclaimed, with a peculiar emphasis:

"What answer can you make to Hagar?"

The Daddy fancied that he knew the worst now, and that by unhesitating recklessness of assertion, and by plausibility, he might be able to defeat her.

"Great Tawney Prince," he replied, in a cringing, specious tone, "Hagar, the Castilian,

is a wonderful 'ccoman. She knows the stars vell; she knows the natur' o' pisons better than any on us. She can speak the langridges of many peoples beside her own; an' she knows equally vell how to make a goolden guinea out o' a buttercup. If she can read the stars vell, she can read 'uman natur' better; an' as even Kings is 'uman and weak, she knows how, by superior ingenooity, to get a good deal the best o' the best on us. Vat chance, then, 'as a poor old viddered objek like the Daddy ven she sets herself up to oppose him?"

"Do speak the truth like a man, without fear or favor, an' not go beatin' about the bush like a cat after a robin!" suddenly interposed the Tawny Prince, snappishly.

The Daddy screwed up his eyes, and ground his teeth together, but he stifled his rage, and went on.

"Vell, then," he said, "I own's as Hagar brought to me the Vite Rosa, as she 'as told you. She had stole it vile sleepin' in its bed from Beechboro', in Kint, vich she hasn't told you. She axed me to bring it up, an' to keep it, an' she wou'd pay me fer its keep at so much a month, vich she didn't. I kep it for years, an' ven it vas taken from me, she neether claimed it nor took it away, it vos some von else. Ven she giv it to me, an' didn't pay for it, she made it mine by our own laws. An' ven she came to me for it, it vos a'ter I had stolen it for myself. Ven it vos captoored from me, her claim vent away with it; ven I stole it back, the gal vos my property, and Hagar can't appeal to our laws and show me von vich gives her a ounce' claim to the Vite Rose. If she can, then I'm done, and Ill be dumb. But, Tawney Prince, there's a heap o' money a hanging to this bloomin' flower, vich vill be mine ven I restores her to her family, as I shall do some day ven they vants her 'ome agen werry bad. Now, I am an old, ancient man, an' I don't s'pose that I've a werry long per'od o' felicious 'appiness an' boundin' gladness to look forrard to. So, ven I gets the goold I speak on through this 'ere little vite-art cherry blossom, I shall divide the whole on't between the lot on you!"

This promise of a piece of practical philanthropy was not without its effect upon the auditory, and they expressed their approbation of his sentiments by a murmur of applause.

"He has already made a considerable sum of money by the beauty of the Poor Girl," interpolated Hagar, "when he compelled her to sell flowers—a poor, ragged, bare-legged creature—"

"Dressed as a forrin' princess, re-gardless of expense!" interrupted the Daddy, sharply, "varn't you, Vite Rose? Didn't you captivate the 'art of a young lord, ven, instead o' being ragged and bare-legged, you wore a sky-blue, star-spotted little gownd, sich as fairies dances in on moonlight nights, a pair o' ra'al vite cotton stockin's on your bare legs, an' bronze kid slippers, vich vern't sho'fuls, upon your tiny feet, an' a wreath of roses upon your snowvy brow?"



A flush of scarlet—it was a blush of humiliation—suffused Floret's face, and, with an air of vexation, she turned her face from him.

Hagar waved her hand impatiently.

"This is idle talk—let us end it. I stand here, O Tawney Prince, upon my right. I know this disowned girl's friends; he does not. He never can make a market of her secret—he never shall. I can restore her to them. I may. If I do, it will be without asking, without accepting—nay, by refusing all recompense. Give her to him, you doom her to some years of shame, of mental agony, to ruin—nay, to utter destruction; restore her to my charge, and, at least, she shall have her happiness and her honor in her own keeping."

"Out-talk my right, if you can, Hagar, 'ooman," cried the Daddy, in excited tones; "I appeal to our laws, an' I call upon our prince to support them, as he has sworn to do. I stole the Vite Rose ven she vos no longer yourn, Hagar, 'ooman, to control, and she belongs to me by the unchangeable laws o' our community."

"Silence, all!" cried the King.

Already the speeches of Hagar and the Daddy had created quite a spirit of partisanship in the listeners, and a discussion in a subdued tone had commenced when the King uttered his command to them to be silent. They obeyed, and as soon as every sound was hushed, he said:

"I have heerd both sides; Hagar forfeited, I think, all her right to further control over the destiny of the Vite Rose, ven she, as she has acknowledged, placed her to gain learnin' with house-dwellers."

"A course," muttered the Daddy.

"An' I thinks," continued the King, "that the Patrico 'stablished a new an' indisputable claim to her ven he kidnapped the Vite Rose on his own account—"

"A course," interpolated the Daddy.

"Silence!" cried the King.

In a moment a huge hand was placed over Daddy's mouth, and his voice became inaudible.

The King turned his eyes upon Floret, who said to her, in a softer tone:

"Come nearer to me, Vite Rose. You are old enough to 'ave a say in this matter. I s'pose, an' you have a right, too, vich shall be given to you."

Floret stepped somewhat timidly up to the side of Hagar, and bent her eyes upon him.

She gave a slight start. At his elbow stood Liper Leper.

He raised his eyes to hers for a moment, and then he let them fall upon the ground.

She knew Liper Leper's ways so well, she understood by that look that he was there to prompt her how to act, and that she was not to appear to recognize him.

She let her eyelids fall too.

"Now, Vite Rose," said the King, encouragingly, "you must answer my questions, an' answer 'em truly. Don't be afeard to speak out, or to speak plain; a good deal o' your own

comfort vill depend upon vot you say yourself. Do you know who you are?"

Floret bent her head down, hurt and humiliated.

"I do not," she murmured, faintly.

"But you vill some day," responded the King, in a soothing tone, "I dessay you vill; but ain't you got no idee, ain't you got no clue, no nothin', to prove who you are some day, ven you gets a chance o' havin' your rights?"

Floret shook her head sorrowfully.

"That's rather odd," he observed, reflectively. "I've seen an' known a good deal about kidnapped kinchins, an' they've gen'rally 'ad a mark, a storberree, or a bunch o' currants, or a mouse, or a heervig, or a lobster, or 'am an' hegges, or summat as their mothers longed for, or vos frightened at afore they wus born, or else they've had a little silver cross, or a golden locket, or summat o' that kind. Ain't you got nothin' o' the sort?"

"Nothing," murmured Floret, almost inaudibly.

The King looked first at Hagar, and then at the Daddy, and he said:

"As both on you claim her, I s'pose that von or tother on you, or both it may be, have got a token vich the fam-ily of the Vite Rose vill recognize ven they sees it."

They both remained silent.

At this moment, Floret, who had glanced at Liper Leper several times, observed him make a gesture to her. She understood him, and her heart beat rapidly, but she remained motionless.

"This is a little orkurd," observed the King, musingly. "For since you have nothing in the way of a token by which you may be recognized by any von who might put in a better claim than either Hagar or the Patrico, I must yield you to—"

Floret, with a sudden movement, bared her wrist; she held before the old man's eyes the tryphon-shaped mark which Hagar had marked upon it years back, and said, in as clear and firm a voice as she could command:

"Behold this symbol! By it I may be known—I am EL YDAIOUR!"

The King sprang to his feet, and threw up his hands.

"Listen all!" he cried, in shrill tones, and with trembling excitement. "The 'nigma is read; the stars speak. The claims of Hagar the Castillian and the Patrico are swep' away like thistle-down afore the vind. Look upon the Vite Rose as the Vite Rose no more. She is EL YDAIOUR, the wanderer!"

"EL YDAIOUR, the WANDERER!" echoed the men and the women, with strange wonder and commotion.

The King waved his hand for silence.

"The child is from the land of the friendless, from the roofless shed of the fatherless, the motherless, the kinless," he exclaimed. "She has no roof-tree but the sky, no bed but the green, grassy turf. She has no tribe



among nations. She has no name among the named; she has no creed among the many creeds; no God but the one, true, universal God—the sun-god. She is a stranger, even among the tribe of Ham. As a human being, she has no rights—save one that is sacred to her, and to be sacredly observed by us—her right is HOSPITALITY!”

A responsive and approving shout was simultaneously raised among the gipsies, who excitedly edged nearer and nearer to the King; narrowing, each moment, the already limited circle.

“We will give her salt; we will eat salt with her,” cried the King.

Another shout of approval responded to his declaration.

“From this moment EL YDAIOUR is free to us, free with us, free from us. Her claim overrules all others; she commands from us shelter and sustenance; help in her distress, assistance of the strong arm when she needs it, and she MUST HAVE IT.”

“She shall have it,” cried the men and women surrounding, mingling their voices together.

“The symbol on her wrist is a token to which we all bow,” continued the King, hoarsely; “it is one to which Hagar the Castilian, and Carkas the Patrico, must bend.”

“They must!” cried the gipsies, sternly, and with what seemed to be one voice.

The King turned to Floret, who had looked upon the whole of this extraordinary incident with a species of trembling wonder.

“EL YDAIOUR!” he exclaimed, emphatically; “fear no more. Every man here is your protector; every woman your servant and your friend while you remain among us. You may eat, drink, and depart in peace. You will stay so long as you likes, you leave us ven you vish, and ven you goes your vay, neether Hagar nor the Patrico dare to foller you, or touch you; if they do, they vill incur the gipsy curse; eyes vill flash at ‘em, tongues hoot at an’ scorn ‘em, hands turn against ‘em, feet spurn ‘em—they vill be hunted and harried, lashed and stoned, flogged and briered, and, at the last ‘our of their life, no sun shall vatch them die, no sun see them live, no earth shall receive their bodies, but they shall hang and rot, bit by bit, day by day, year by year, from the deadly vite branches of a withered, blight smitten tree, the gipsy’s curse clinging to them, so long as von bone of their frail carcases is left visible to the eye of man, or even a bird. I have spoken. EL YDAIOUR, move vere you vill, the Patrico and Hagar the Castilian shall not leave us, until you are far from this, an’ vere you may vish to be. Break up all!”

As he concluded, he descended from his turf-covered throne, and he moved slowly away toward a small colony of tents at no great distance.

At the same moment, both Hagar and the Daddy made a movement toward Floret. The two gipsies who had the Daddy in their cus-

tody accompanied him, however, and one of them whispered to him:

“Vere’s the pisoned knife—give it to me?”

The Daddy mechanically put his hand in his pocket, and passed it to him without an objection or a word of remonstrance. The gipsy glanced at it, and put it cautiously in an inner pocket in the breast of his coat.

Floret, as she saw both Hagar and the Daddy approach her, gave an alarmed look at Liper Leper, who had remained where he stood when he made the sign which had proved so serviceable to her. In a moment he was at her side, and said:

“You have no cause for fear, Floret; you are now even more powerful here than the King himself.”

“Ay!” exclaimed Hagar, bitterly, as she overheard the last words; “more powerful than I, who hold your happiness in my keeping. I thought not, when I marked that symbol on your wrist, so that I alone might know you when a woman grown, that it would rob me wholly of the power of injuring or of serving you. Henceforth our destinies, still interwoven, must move on in an uncontrolled sphere; I dare not attempt to further control you; I cease to take any active interest in your fate. You are from this hour as free from my influence as though you had never known me, or as though I had never been born.”

She, as the last word quitted her lips, turned and pointed with a stern gesture to the Daddy.

“But you are also absolved from his power!” she exclaimed, displaying her white teeth in the rancor with which she spoke. “You have drawn his fangs, his claws; his sordid avarice can never again reach you—his Devilish malignity harm you. He has threatened you with death from a poisoned weapon—he dare not from this moment touch you, even in play, with a feather. He may not even speak to you, unless you will it—mark me, unless it be with your will, or at your wish. And this privilege extends to me as to him. If it is your wish to speak to me, I will speak with you alone. I will lift the seals from my lips, I will tell you who you are and what you are, if you dare to hear it. I have no longer any motive in keeping hidden from you that which you must some day know; and I will, therefore, if you desire it, at once disclose to you all I know concerning your secret history, and then—bid you farewell forever.”

“O, I desire most earnestly to learn all I can of my true history!” exclaimed Floret, anxiously. “I will speak with you alone now, at this moment, and I entreat you to keep nothing hidden from me!”

“Are you prepared to listen to that which you may hereafter wish, from the depths of a broken heart, had never fallen upon your ears?” asked Hagar, gravely.

“I am prepared for every consequence,” cried Floret, eagerly. “No anguish, no torture can equal that which my absolute ignorance of who and what I am hourly inflicts



upon my heart." "Follow me to my tent, and you shall know all," responded Hagar.

She turned and moved slowly away. Floret looked at Liper Leber. He motioned her to follow Hagar, and she moved away in obedience to his sign.

The Daddy, however, stretched out his arms to her, and cried, hoarsely:

"Vite Rose—Vi—Vite Rose, don't leave me—don't go away with Hagar, don't—you will rob me—of all—of all—all my—good—my good!"

The words seemed to die in his throat—his head rolled horribly from side to side, and he fell forward upon the ground in a fit.

## CHAPTER XVI

"O! 'tis not, Hinda, in the power  
Of Fancy's most terrific touch  
To paint thy pangs in that dread hour—  
Thy silent agony—'twas such  
As those who feel could paint too well,  
But none e'er felt and lived to tell!  
'Twas not alone the dreary state  
Of a lone spirit crush'd by fate,  
When, though no more remains to dread,  
The panic chill will not depart—  
When, though the inmate, Hope, be dead,  
Her ghostly ill haunts the moldering heart.  
No—pleasures, hopes, affections gone,  
The wretch may bear and yet live on,  
Like things within the cold rock found,  
Alive when all's congeal'd around;  
But there's a blank repose in this,  
A calm stagnation, that were bliss  
To the keen, burning, harrowing pain  
Now felt through all her breast and brain—  
From whose hot throbs, whose deadly aching  
The heart hath no relief but breaking."—MOORE.

As Hagar reached her tent, her eyes fell upon a middle-aged man, reclining upon the sward close to it, who had a swarthy complexion, handsome features, and long, straggling, glossy black hair. He was picturesquely attired; and, though not a model of cleanliness, either in skin or garb, he was yet not unattractive in his appearance. He was smoking a black clay pipe, and appeared to be buried in a fit of profound abstraction.

The brow of Hagar lowered as she gazed upon him, and she stopped short abruptly. She turned back, said a few concise words in Spanish to the aged woman, Eleia, who accompanied her, and striking off in a direction which led into a thickly-wooded part of the hill, she motioned to Floret to follow her.

Eleia, the Castilian, by her directions, proceeded to the man whom Hagar had evidently avoided, and Floret, whose mind was too much occupied by conjectures relative to the revelations she expected immediately to hear to care whither she was conducted, followed Hagar into the wood.

It was not necessary to proceed far to obtain both seclusion and security from listeners, and Hagar paused in a wild, gloomy, narrow copse, until Floret reached her. Then, casting her eyes slowly round her, she said:

"We will rest here. What I have to reveal, and you to hear, may now be spoken unreservedly. In this spot there will be no other eyes than our own to watch us—no other ears than ours to catch up our words."

"Be it as you think best," returned Floret; "I am in your hands, and I have no choice."

"You have the choice of declining to hear what I am able, and what I am ready to communicate to you," rejoined Hagar, gazing fixedly at her.

Floret raised her head, and turned her marble-hued face to Hagar. She drew herself up somewhat proudly, and answered firmly:

"No; I have not even that choice. The desire to know who I am, from whence sprung—wherefore I should be surrounded by mysteries which are to me incomprehensible—why I am not only an outcast, but that individuals, to whom I cannot possibly be allied by any ties of affinity, should strive to exercise a power over me—is like a raging fever-thirst, which would force me to drink from a chalice, although I were forewarned that the liquor it contained was poison."

"It is a poisoned chalice only which I can offer," returned Hagar, with slow emphasis. "Will you drink from it?"

"I will drain it, though it were all dregs," responded Floret, readily.

"It is all dregs," replied Hagar, sharply; "bitter, noisome dregs. Small as are your chances for future happiness, it will be better, perhaps, for you to rest with resignation beneath the murky veil which covers you, than to put forth even a finger to lift it."

"You are speaking still in enigmas to me!" exclaimed Floret, impatiently. "What are you? What do you know me? Your garb is such as, I have read, the Spanish Gitanas wear; your language, your manner, is not that of a gipsy. In what way are you connected with me? Speak, I implore you—speak to me in the plainest terms. What I have to learn surely needs no such preparation as you are bestowing upon it."

"I would spare your feelings as much as I can," observed Hagar, calmly.

"But you are torturing them!" persisted Floret, agitatedly. "If it be in your power to tell me who I am, what I am, and to what I have to look forward in the future, have mercy upon me, and tell me at once! My feelings have not hitherto met with such considerate attention with you or any one, save Mamma Atten—such anxious interest has not been hitherto exhibited in my welfare, that you need hesitate now to communicate to me, briefly, whatever you may know, even though it may cost me some bitter pangs."

Hagar waved her hand.

"I have the interests and the secrets of others in my custody, as well as yours," she replied. "You must hear your story as I think it expedient to tell it, or not at all."

"I am silent!" ejaculated Floret, in a tone of forced resignation.

"I have already spoken to you of love," pursued Hagar, with a thoughtful aspect, and with her large, resplendent black eyes fastened abstractedly upon the greasy hillocks before her. "It is a sentiment—a passion—a madness—it reck little what; "but it is a feeling



of which you can at present know nothing. I hope you never may. You must have read of its effects in books; and you may, in your young heart, find some palliative excuse for those who, having endured its wildest emotions, have been overpowered by them—and have fallen."

Hagar drew a deep breath, and then went on:

"Years past, a young Count of Spain, riding through a wood in Andalusia, was shot by an unseen hand. The bullet brought him to the ground, and laid him senseless there. A young girl, not older than yourself, heard the shot, the wild cry of agony which burst from the lips of the wounded man, the clattering of the horse's feet as he fled affrightedly down the glade, and she hastened to the spot from whence the shriek of agony arose. There, senseless, she found stretched the bleeding body of the youthful cavalier. She was a Gitana, a daughter of the Calés—one of the tribe it was whose pistol-shot had leveled the poor youth to the ground. But her father was a Count of the Calés, and he loved his child better than his life. She summoned him to her side, and by his aid the wounded cavalier was borne to a tent, and there his hurt was examined. It was not fatal; the lead had struck no vital part, but he had lost much blood, and was too weak to be moved after his wound was dressed. He did not quit the tent or the wood for months after that event.

"The girl, for the period I have mentioned, was almost his sole attendant. She smoothed his pillow; she handed him the cooling drinks necessary to subdue his malady, and the fragrant fruits to moisten his parched lips; she smiled upon him to cheer him in his loneliness; sang to him, danced to him to the music of her guitar, and exhausted all the pretty arts of which she was mistress, to prevent his mind sinking into a state of dejected dolor during his enfeebled state.

"She was rewarded by his recovery, she was rewarded with his love, she was rewarded with his hand—for he married her, and lived with her and with her people, the Calés, for a year. At the expiration of that year, a child was born to them. It was a girl. The Count loved it, as he loved its mother, passionately; and he resolved that the dweller of the woods, the mountain fastnesses, the pathless forests, and at times the vile clad suburbs of some of Spain's fairest cities, should have a palace for a home, highly cultivated estates for her wanderings; and, instead of the Gitani, La Encantadéra, she should become Señora Doña de Quixada de Velasco Countess de Orsoro, and his daughter be converted from La Gitani to Señorita Doña Angelica de Quixada de Velasco de Orsoro.

"In the fulfillment of his intention, he presented himself before his father, the head and the proudest member of one of the oldest families of Castile. He was received with great joy and much rejoicing. In the fullness of his heart, and the excitement of his delight

at his affectionate reception, he gave to his family a history of his accident and its result. He spoke in glowing terms of his beautiful young wife and his beloved child, and as he increased in enthusiasm, he suddenly perceived his hearers subsiding into a cold silence. When he had concluded, they were frozen into figures of ice.

"He was a minor, and his proud father made short work of the matter. By the laws of Spain he was unable to contract a marriage without his parent's consent—he was unable to contract a marriage with one who was without the pale of his Church. The marriage was at once annulled, as though it had never been. The Count was thrown into prison by his father, because he rebelled with frantic fierceness and desperation against his authority, and against his disposition of affairs; and a troop of dragoons was dispatched to drive his unhappy wife—alas! wife no longer—with her offspring, cut of Castile, and, through the Duke de Orsoro's great influence, even out of the kingdom of Spain.

"The merciless father was determined that the *sangre azul*, the 'blue blood' which flowed in his veins, should not be contaminated by any taint drawn from one of a tribe of Eastern origin, and he effected his object. He separated the briefly happy pair forever on earth.

"El Condé Orsoro lost his life in leaping from his prison window into a moat beneath it, in an attempt to escape, and his love—alas! his wife no longer—La Encantadéra, died of a broken heart, after the tidings conveyed to her—alas! too soon communicated to her.

"Now, Floret, mark me! The Condé Orsoro was my father, La Encantadéra was my mother. What am I? Do you comprehend me, girl? What position do I hold in the world? Answer me!"

Floret gazed upon her with a species of terror, but remained silent.

Hagar's eyes flashed with a fiery brilliancy as she repeated her question.

"What am I in the eyes of the Church? What am I in the eyes of the law? What am I in the estimation of that huge hypocrisy, 'society'? A pariah!—an outcast!—a nameless creature of shame! Do you understand me now, Floret?"

Floret compressed her hands; a feeling of intense stifle over her.

"I cannot see that you are an object of humiliation," she said, faintly; "for your father and your mother were married, and by a church ceremonial, I presume?"

"They were," rejoined Hagar, quickly. "The words invoked by the priest who united them were—'Those whom God has joined let no man put asunder! But man did put them asunder; he made their marriage-ceremony a mockery, and of me a creature of shame—a thing of the world, not legitimate! I cannot inherit—I cannot claim the law's protection! I have no rights—I, the daughter of a Count of Spain, am that humiliated object of contemptuous reproach, a—my throat swells at the



hated word—I am in the eyes of the law—a bastard!"

She gasped as she forced the words out, and thick drops of perspiration stood upon her brow.

Floret, as if a presentiment of the revelation which was to follow this painful history, stole over her mind, felt a strange numbness about the heart, and a ringing in the ears which made it a most difficult for her to hear distinctly Hagar's words. She could not trust herself to utter a word. She stood motionless, and gazed steadfastly, wonderingly, and with a very pained expression, at her singular companion.

At length, Hagar, somewhat recovering her composure, said to her:

"I now address myself, Floret, to your past. I have told you that I would elucidate it by an illustration. I have given you one—you can apply it."

"No! no! no!" half-shrieked the distressed girl, with a horrified look.

"Nay, you must have the facts, then," rejoined Hagar, turning her face away from her ghastly countenance. It seemed as if she was unable to witness unmoved the wild and desperate gaspings for breath with which Floret listened to words, every one of which fell blistering upon her heart like drops of molten lead. "You entreated me to conceal nothing from you—you shall know all. At least, all that is essential for you to know. For what can it matter to you how or where your parents met, it will suffice, alas! for you that they did meet. At that fated hour your mother was of your age, no more, and as like you in feature and in form as it may be possible for twin sisters to be; with this difference only, that she was reared in pampered luxury, you in poverty and wretchedness; and she, therefore, possessed outwardly all the superiority of appearance and carriage which such advantages would give her. She was, however, in temper imperious, self-willed, impatient of control, and needed a mother's most anxious and solicitous care, and unhappily failed to receive it. At the very moment she should have been fenced round with her mother's discrimination, judgment, and affectionate counsel, she met—and in secret—one whose form was framed to make a young girl's heart leap out of her own keeping into his—one capable of captivating her young and innocent imagination, and who hesitated not to do it—one who, having extorted her heart from her, had not one to give in return. No doubt, the passion which thus sprung into existence was, while it lasted, a sweet delirium—a term of happy infatuation. But the awakening came. She who had slumbered the most unobtrusively, found the return to consciousness a process of unmitigated horror. She awoke to the discovery that she had been made the dupe of an insincere, a heartless villain; that the heart she had yearned for—for which she had wholly and completely resigned herself—had not been surrendered to her; nay, that she had loved a creature with no heart. She awoke to this discovery, as I have said,

from one short dream of bliss; but she awoke, also, to the horror that she—young, fair, of patrician descent—possessed, in lieu of this heart—Great Spirit!—a child!"

Hagar paused as, with a scathing emphasis, she uttered those terrible words, and she gazed earnestly on Floret.

The latter was standing as before, pale and motionless, like a young tree that had been struck by a lightning-shaft, and withered.

Her face was absolutely colorless; her eyes were fixed upon the pallid, yellow face of Hagar; her lips were apart, and through them her breath went and came with agonizing difficulty; but not a sound escaped them, not a muscle in her frame quivered, nor did her eyelids tremble; but she gazed at Hagar with a searching, settled, penetrating scrutiny, which she did not, while she was speaking to her, for a moment avert.

The steadfastness of her look slightly disconcerted the gipsy; but she turned her black eyes upon the turf, and, as if unaffected by it, proceeded with her harrowing communication.

"The child of whom I have spoken," she said, in her usual low, grave tone, "was brought into life in secret—it was conveyed away in secret to an obscure place, and intrusted to people who had no idea, and were not likely to have any conception of its parents. It was a thing without a name; its lot was one yet more degraded than my own—not even the mockery of a ceremony was gone through with, which might have consecrated its birth. It was the offspring of guilt, and in the first moment of its unhappy existence it became an object of shame.

"Poor little innocent, miserable, nameless object! it was born to misfortune, born to trial and trouble, born to be itself ever wretched, and to be the cause of misery to others, ay, even in the breasts of those who best loved it! Its father—well, we will not speak of him, save to say, that ere it had been born a twelve-month, he married a young lady of fair fame and much wealth. Its mother very quickly afterward gave her hand in marriage to one of the wealthiest and haughtiest peers of this great kingdom. She ignored the existence of her child; but married that proud Lord in her maiden name as a young, innocent girl, of unblemished reputation—married him as one entitled honestly to wear her father's name, until she changed it for that of the illustrious Lord who made her his Marchioness.

"The offending pair moved on each other in their high sphere, neither wasting a thought upon the unhappy proof of their guilt; but neither winning a moment's happiness out of the course they had each taken, in the expectation of securing the constant enjoyment of human pleasure! The child proceeded on its destiny. A young girl, who had been reared with the mother of the babe, and who loved her truly and tenderly, took charge of the offspring—intending, no doubt, to take the place of the parents who had so barbarously deserted it; but the child, in the fulfillment of its



destiny, brought only woe to this unhappy girl. Her lover, to whom she refused to disclose the poor child's secret, taxed her with being its sinful mother. Poor girl! the result of that bitter quarrel was, that one morning poor Fanny Shelley was found drowned—murdered, too—in a deep brook near Beachborough—

Floret tried to scream—to shriek—but no sound came from her lips. She gasped, she panted, and struggled for breath, in a manner terrible to witness.

Kinging in her brain were words, which had suddenly come back to her with dreadful force.

They were these:

"God bless poor Grandmammy Fanny!"

She writhed and twisted with the destroying agony of the inward emotion which was convulsing her. At length, two or three low, hoarse sobs burst from her lips, and she said, interrogatively, in a tone which almost congealed the blood of Hagar in her veins:

"I—I am that child?"

"You are!" returned Hagar, in a voice as hoarse as her own.

Floret tossed her hands wildly above her head, uttered a cry of agony, a prolonged wailing, anguished, despairing cry, and fell lifeless upon the cold, rank grass.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"Still in her heart she heard the funeral dirge of the ocean,

But with its sound there was mingled a voice that whispered 'Despair not!'

Thus did that poor soul wander in want and cheerless discomfort,

Bleeding, barefooted, over the shards and thorns of existence.

Let me essay, O Muse! to follow the wanderer's footsteps."

—EVANGELINE.

It was long before Floret could be said to be sufficiently recovered to comprehend all that had transpired; but Hagar, with a curious ferocity which was actually not intended to be such, compelled her to recall the leading features of the disclosures which she had made, in order that they might together exhaust the subject.

"For," continued the latter, "it is improbable, after we have parted to-day—I had almost said impossible, but nothing is impossible, you may yet discover even that—that we should meet again. You have yourself deprived me of the power of even serving you. You have appealed to our Tawney Prince to protect you; he has done so by withdrawing from both myself and the Daddy the power of interfering in any fashion in your interests. After you are on your way to the great capital, to which you are directing your steps, both he and I will have to undergo a ceremony which will withdraw from your future fate all interposition either of his or mine. Now, remembering all that I have communicated to you, reflecting what you are—what you know yourself to be—have you aught further to ask of me?"

Floret, who had stood crouching and trembling, with head bowed like one stricken with a palsy, now slowly raised her form erect, and took two or three paces backward and forward upon the turf. She passed her thin hands over her pinched temples, she pressed her attenuated fingers upon her pinked eyelids, as if to press the light out from her aching eyes. She drew a deep breath, then pausing, she halted before Hagar, and with a firmness of demeanor for which she was not prepared, she said, in a low, hard tone:

"Tell me the name of the—the woman whom you have said is my mother, and a marchioness—"

Hagar, though a little startled, turned her brilliant dark eyes upon Floret's, and gazed into them searchingly. Floret bore her glittering, steadfast examination, without wavering.

"Coupled with it," said Hagar, slowly, with a slight scornful expression upon her lip, "the name of him who is your father, and an earl."

If Floret's cheek could then have cast a white reflection upon unsullied snow, those words would have helped to make it even yet whiter; still they did not strike her down, nor did she permit them to compel her to give any outward sign of the almost unendurable inward agony which they occasioned her.

She only said:

"I do not wish to hear it—to know it."

"Not that you may curse it," exclaimed Hagar, with passionate bitterness—bissing the words, indeed—through her closed teeth.

"The name of my mother. I ask only that?" rejoined Floret, speaking with forced calmness, and almost closed eyelids.

Hagar regarded her attentively.

"Why do you ask for that alone?" she inquired, somewhat earnestly.

"If you cannot guess, it would be useless for me to enlighten you," returned Floret, as frigidly as before; "give me the name of the woman of whom you have been speaking?"

A perceptible shudder ran through Hagar's frame. She raised her hand partly up, and said, in a low voice:

"That you may curse her. No," she added, vehemently; "no. You are a girl—a mere child—you will yet be a woman. You have not loved, you may love: then you will learn to know what a woman will do for the man she loves; you will discover that while he hesitates, reflects, and reasons, she acts. She gives to him her heart, her life, her soul; she intrusts him with name, fame, reputation, happiness, all that can make life valuable, or love estimable, or the world a paradise. You will learn to know how she clings to him like a tendril—to him alone—entwining round him all her affections, hopes, and aspirations—drawing joy, felicity, even life itself from him, and you may yet learn that, after having done this, after having yielded without a murmur—nay, with joy, all that I have enumerated—ay, more; he wrenches her from about him—from



his heart, from his daily life—and casts her from him, as though, like the ivy, she were a pestiferous weed, which destroys all that it clings to. Curse the tempter, not the tempted! Curse the living blight, not the blighted! Curse the destroyer, not the fallen! Curse him that made of a living, loving human heart, generous without limit to him, the toy of a day! Curse him who, having by wiles, and lures, and falsehood, won a heart which is priceless to the giver, and should be to him, fritters it away piecemeal, or madly shatters it!—but curse not her whose miserable example even you may follow.”

“In the name of that Almighty Power, in whose dread presence we may both, perhaps, shortly stand, have mercy upon me and enlarge no more upon this subject,” interposed Floret, speaking with deep inward agony. “It is now plain to me that you are, and have been, the agent of the unnamed Marchioness who is—who—is my—”

Her voice became choked with emotion, and she paused.

Hagar comprehended her meaning, and said:

“You surmise correctly.”

Floret waved her hand.

“It is plain that she is desirous that I should not hear her name, that she should never hear of me me more,” she continued, speaking rapidly and with much excitement.

“Your impression could not be more faithful had you heard from me the wishes that she has expressed,” answered Hagar, with slow emphasis; “and—”

“It is enough!” exclaimed Floret, impatiently.

“It is not yet all!” rejoined Hagar.

“I tell you, it is enough!” cried Floret, impetuously; “I will hear no more.”

“You must hear more!” returned Hagar, clutching at her wrist as she was about to quit the copse. “A tigress will provide for its young. Although the Marchioness, of whom we have spoken, desires neither to see nor to hear of you—that you should never hear her name breathed—she, nevertheless, does not forget that you are a young, unfriended girl, that you will have requirements, needs, and wants, with which, though she has supplied you with a good education, you will be unable to provide yourself. She has, through me, made arrangements to provide you with money when you greatly need it. You will need some now, when, having fled from your school, you are hurrying you know not whither. I am aware that you have chosen London as your destination, but I am aware, too, what there awaits a poverty-stricken girl, endowed with beauty, who is starving, while looking, with aching heart, for something to do by which she can earn a living. I have a purse of money here; it is yours, and if you should expend it before you have obtained employment, here is an address to which you can send a note, in which alone you will put the name

and number of the place in which you reside, and the words, ‘I am in want.’”

As Hagar concluded, she attempted to place in Floret’s hand a seemingly well-stored purse, but Floret recoiled from her with a sudden, piercing cry of horror, and she started back herself.

Recovering herself, however, quickly, she again advanced to Floret, and, forcing the purse into her hand, she said, with emphasis:

“To refuse this would be childish sentimentalism.”

But Floret, with a renewed cry of agony, hurled the purse from her, and, sobbing only as one who has a broken heart sobs, tottered rather than ran out of the copse.

Hagar watched her as she departed; she did not offer to stay her, but she breathed heavily as she disappeared.

“Poor Girl!” she muttered; “her destiny is a hard one, but the planet which rules that destiny has prognosticated suffering only for it, it portends danger and suffering still. I am but an instrument of the stars. I would fain not go on with the task I have undertaken, but my destiny and hers will that it should be so. But I will not lose sight of her, despite what the Tawney Prince may decree, and I can find a willing hand to aid me, though palm to palm he compels me to swear to refrain evermore from stepping between the Wanderer and her lot.

She picked up the purse which Floret had cast away in scorn as she concluded, and secreteing it about her person, she moved slowly out of the copse.

As the intertwined leaves and branches of the thickly-entangled trees hid her gay dress from sight, a man’s figure rose up from a leafy recess closely contiguous to the spot on which she and Floret had stood while they were communing together, and stepped lightly into the open part of the coppice. He watched the direction which Hagar had taken, and then proceeded cautiously to the path over which Floret had tottered when she broke away from Hagar.

He followed Floret until he observed that she had unwittingly wandered into a spot no less obscure than that which she had just quitted, and then quickening his step he gained her side.

“Floret!” he breathed softly in her ear.

She started and slightly screamed. When she saw who it was, she shrank from him as though she were some shameful creature whose very touch would contaminate him.

He gazed upon her sorrowfully.

“Fairer flower of the forest,” he said, in his soft, silvery tone, “do not shrink from yourself; remember that you are pure and innocent, and while that you are so, the guilt of others cannot defile you.”

She wrung her hands, and muttered a few incoherent words.

“O White Rose, purified even by the fiery ordeal through which you are passing,” he



said, elevating his voice, "where are your firmness, your endurance, your self-respect?"

"Gone, gone, gone, all—all gone!" she cried, wildly. "I have none left, none, none! I am a nameless, shameful outcast—"

"Not shameful, Floret," he interposed, quickly. "O White Rose, not one snowy leaf of your spotless nature is tainted!—no, not a fold, even down to the very depths of your pure heart, wears upon it a speck or a stain. The impurity of another's fame, though closely connected with you, does not tarnish yours. Besides, some day—"

"I will not live until some day!" she exclaimed, with a curious, startling savageness.

He caught her by the dress, suddenly, and pointed upward, and with a solemn and even dignified gesture, said:

"There dwells the Judge of what is right that we should do."

She turned her eyes quickly upon him as he touched her dress, and they followed his hand as it made its gesture to heaven.

She cowered for a moment, and then flinging herself upon the ground, she gave way once more to a frantic passion of agonizing, bitter tears.

Liper Leper knelt by her side, and essayed to comfort her. He called upon her to exert the courage and the powers which he knew her to possess, and he earnestly endeavored to assure her that her sky could not be always overcast. He reminded her that she had duties to perform as well as aspirations to conceive, and that those duties taught her to live for others as well as for herself.

She wrung her hands still.

"Whom have I now to live for?" she exclaimed, piteously.

Two very opposite persons were present in their mental visions at that moment.

Liper turned partly round, and pointing from the spot, said:

"The young lady from the school in Yorkshire, who is seated in yonder tent awaiting you, what will become of her if you desert her?"

A flush of crimson passed over Floret's face and neck, she rose up from the grass, and when upon her feet she was as white as death itself.

"Conduct me to her, Liper," she said, in a feeble tone. "You have taught me a lesson. May I profit by it! I do not know how to thank you—nay, thanks from me are worthless—"

"Floret," interrupted Liper, speaking with a strange energy, speak not to me of thanks now. Never yet have I rendered you a service worth your acknowledgment; but the day will come when such service as I contemplate will be indeed deserving of your thanks—but when, too, Floret, your thanks will be a prize worth winning. Speak no more of me now; speak only, think only, of yourself. We shall break up the tents and separate to-morrow. It would be better for you to leave this place ere sundown. I will join you before you have

reached far, and will conduct you to a railway by means of which you will be conveyed to London without further fatigue, and while making your way thither you can make your arrangements respecting your future proceedings in London, and you may do so without fear of further interference from the Daddy. Yonder is the tent in which your friend is seated—there is the path it will be best for you to take when you leave it, and pursue it until I overtake you. You will see it winds round a narrow strip of the base of the hill, and it will conduct you to the vale along which you will have to journey to the railway station."

As he uttered the last words, he glided from the spot.

Floret gazed after him, and murmured, earnestly:

"Would that the rest of the world were but half as kind and faithful as Liper Leper!"

Within a minute from that time, she was folded in the arms of Ida; but almost instantaneously she broke from her embrace, only to renew it with more passionate ardor than before.

For suddenly, as she recoiled from Ida, she remembered that her poor friend, like her, was nameless and friendless: had been placed at the horrible school at Uggelbarnby even as she had herself; some one, she knew not whom, had paid for a time for her living, but it was only too palpable that she, too, was the offspring of one who dared not acknowledge her.

Then it was that Floret seemed to feel that she had met with a sister in misfortune, whose poverty, trials, and humiliation were not only of a kindred character, but sprang from a kindred source; and she pressed her to her heart with more warmth and more genuine sincerity than she would have done had the embrace been given under more prosperous circumstances.

To Ida all this embracing and recoiling was unintelligible. She saw that Floret had been suffering greatly from grievous emotion, and she put a hundred rapid questions to her, which Floret was obliged to repress, but at the same time to promise to answer at the first convenient opportunity.

Then she gladdened her heart by telling her that they were both quite safe, and would be permitted to start upon their way to London in a few short hours.

Even while she was speaking, two young gipsy girls made their appearance with a basket which contained some very excellent and enticing eatables and some refreshing beverage. They quickly spread them before the two young girls, and requested them to eat and enjoy themselves; to ask also for anything which they might require, and if it was to be obtained upon the spot, it would be furnished to them.

They then left Floret and Ida to partake of their repast by themselves, and as they had a long journey before them, Floret easily per-



suaded Ida to eat heartily, but she had no power to touch more than a morsel herself.

As soon as the sun began to decline, Floret finding that none of the gipsies approached them, that their small bundles had been placed in their tent, and that they were evidently free to act for themselves, suggested to Ida that they should quietly take their departure.

Ida was only too glad to agree to the suggestion. She was very quickly ready to depart, and having arranged their faded, but yet in its appearance smart attire, they each secured a bundle, and made their way down the path which Liper Leper had pointed out to Floret.

It, after half an hour's walk, led them into a public road, and Floret, knowing that the fact of its being public was suggestively in itself a protection, she was glad to enter upon and proceed along it with a quickened pace.

With a light step and a lighter heart than she had experienced since she started, Ida kept pace with her, employing her tongue with a volubility which, had Floret had less care upon her mind, would have amused her. As it was, it helped to divert some of her saddest thoughts.

As night set in, Floret began to look anxiously for Liper Leper, and she had not to look in vain, for a sudden scream from Ida, as they reached a spot darkened by overhanging trees, showed to her Liper Leper by their side.

He seemed strangely taciturn, but yet gentle and kind in the few words that he did speak. He confined himself almost entirely to directing them what to do when they reached London, advising them where to obtain lodgings, and how to set about to search for Mamma Atten, for her abode it was that Floret hoped to find, and from her the means of acquiring a livelihood, until she should finally determine what her future course should be.

Liper Leper completed his instructions as they reached the railway station, placed them in a carriage in which they were likely to perform the journey alone, and bade them an abrupt and hasty farewell.

As his hand disappeared from the carriage-window, a shrill whistle sounded, and the two poor, friendless girls were borne to London to tempt fortune.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"Not death—death was no more refuge or rest;  
Not life—it was despair to be!—not sleep,  
For fiends and crasms of fire had dispossessed  
All natural dreams: to wake was not to weep,  
But to gaze mad and pallid at the leap  
To which the future, like a snaky scourge,  
Or like some tyrant's eye which aye doth keep  
Its withering beam upon his slave did urge  
Their steps."  
—SHRELLY.

It was night when the train which conveyed Floret and Ida to London reached its destination.

Following Liper Leper's advice, they proceeded, half-bewildered by the excitement and the noise attendant upon the disgorging of the living freight borne by the train in which

which they could obtain, cheaply, clean and comfortable repose for the night. They were fortunate in securing a sleeping apartment for a moderate sum, and though they found it difficult to obtain much sleep in the strange place, abounding as it did in noises, occasioned throughout the night by persons arriving at or departing from London, they passed the night with satisfaction, and a greater sense of security than they had felt since they had quitted the "eligible establishment" of the Bluxentinks.

They breakfasted in an apartment in which many other persons breakfasted, too, and in which the smell of coffee, and something else, which seemed to be a cross between "hard-bake" and burnt cake, overpowered all other effluvia.

They felt confused and embarrassed, for it appeared as if every one stared at them with an inquisitive and questioning look, as though it concerned them much to know their history, and that they would be glad to be put in possession of it.

One gentleman, indeed, whose looks, moustache, and beard were of a flame-color, of very irregular growth, and of undoubted dirtiness, seemed to much admire their presence. He distended his unlashd lids, and never took his whitey-gray eyes off them while he called for "'Arr a pint of corfee, roll and butter, an' a 'errin'." And when he perceived that Ida's brilliant eyes were fastened upon him, with a look in which admiration was not blended with astonishment, he fancied that it was the correct thing to close up one eye sharply, and open it again, and then grin, to the unfavorable development of some jagged teeth, set in a fringe of green moss, which grew in wild luxuriance about the upper edges of his gums.

Ida did not comprehend this pantomime, but she was unable to resist smiling at the dirty and grotesque object before her, while Floret, whose childish memories were not such as to lead her to believe that the man's conduct was a preliminary to anything advantageous to them, looked frightened.

Ida's smile was however, in the eyes of the individual, an encouragement to open a conversation, and so he nodded and drew up to the table at which they were seated.

He turned to the landlord, and said:

"I'll take my corfee, roll and butter, an' 'errin' ere."

Neither Floret nor Ida had finished their repast, when the man gave his instructions to the landlord, but Ida rose up and said, hastily:

"Let us go away."

Floret quitted her seat immediately, and was about to depart, but the man placed his hand upon her arm, and exclaimed, quickly:

"Not altogether, Miss; you ain't a-goin' to hook it in such a 'urry."

Floret did not answer him, but shook his hand from her arm.

He caught hold of Ida's mantle, and exclaimed, in a low tone:

"Come, none o' your natty-particklar vays; jest it down, vill you? You ain't done your breakfasts."

Ida snatched her mantle from him, and, looking rather white, said:

"I do not want any more."

"That be blowed," he replied, hurriedly; "sit down, I tell you. I want to talk to you. I'll stand another cup an' a rasher; there!—sit down."

He caught her once more by her cloak, and detained her.

Ida looked at him frowningly and haughtily. She plucked at her mantle to liberate herself, and said, freezingly:

"You will be good enough to remove your hand from my mantle. I don't know you; I don't wish to know you."

Floret looked for her landlord, to claim his protection; but he was away in some secret recess, deeply engaged in producing the beverage which the dirty individual with the flame-hue looks had ordered.

"Walker," rejoined the fellow, "we shall be good friends enough, I dessay. You sit down, or I shall jest be obliged to make you, you know."

A smart groom, who had entered a few minutes previously, and was tossing-off a cup of "Our-mixture-at three-and-four", into which he had plunged "half a quarten" of genuine "British brandy, strongly recommended by the Faculty", had fixed his eyes upon Floret's face the moment he had entered, and had kept them there. A conviction passed through his mind that her features were very familiar to him, and, simultaneously with it, that the brandy had been made somewhere in the neighborhood of Smithfield. While he was assuring himself that both were facts, he overheard the individual with the grubby beard inform Ida that he would make her resume her seat.

A thought crossed him, and he walked deliberately across the room, and touched Ida's assailant rather smartly on the shoulder.

The fellow turned quickly round, and perceived, with some surprise, the short natty groom at his elbow.

The latter pointed quietly to the fellow's hand, which still held Ida, and he said, in a low, but very decided tone:

"You'd better drop that neat thing in mantles."

"Why?" asked the man, sharply.

"For se-ver-al reasons," resumed the groom, readily. "Von of vich is that you ain't no business vith it, an' you ain't wanted to have any business vith it. Your company isn't wanted, and your habence is."

The man displayed his jagged teeth, but this time angrily.

"Vot do you know about it?" he asked, with an expression which implied, also, that the groom was meddling.

"I sees that you are making the young ladies leave their breakfasts afore they've finished it," he answered. "You may be werry fond, ven in your own kennel, of looking into that

ere 'ighly-finished, polished, tin-plate looking glass o' yours—a real bargain at four-an'-six; but it ain't every von as likes to contemplate the pictur of an ugly man's b.b.y. You may do werry well for a female 'rang'-a-tang, but you won't do for nothing puttier, vill he, Miss?" he added, addressing Floret, and staring at her with a look of singularly-searching inquiry.

Floret instinctively knew that this groom, who regarded her with such a deliberate steadfastness, was interfering from no common motive; and as he felt that she had nothing to hope for even from him, and all to fear, she would not reply, but averting her head, moved, as if in search of the landlord.

At the same moment, the groom moved behind the man whom he had addressed, and, by a simple jerk of his wrist, liberated Ida's mantle from his hand, and then placed himself between them.

"You want to get yourself into a row," I think," observed the carrot-headed party, addressing the groom, fiercely.

"Well, do, werry bad," he retorted; "an' I shall, too, because if you don't go and take your chicoree at another table, I shall chuck your cup into the street, and you along vith it—O!" he added, as the landlord made his appearance with the "half a pint" of coffee and the fragrant bleater, "this article vill take his dose at another part of the 'stablishment; 'jes put it over there."

In another instant, a very angry altercation ensued, and it was followed by a "terrific combat". The fiery-bearded, unclean customer for the "errin", being of an irascible turn, finding the sarcastic remarks of the groom on his personal appearance unendurable, made a sudden and violent blow at him; but the groom nimbly ducked, and avoided it. Not so the landlord, who stood immediately behind the groom, holding the coffee, the roll, and butter, and the bloated fish of Yarmouth split open and grilled, upon a tray. He received the hit immediately under the chin, and though the force was slightly spent, it reached him with sufficient velocity to place him and the coffee, the roll and butter, the herring, and the tray, in the adjoining apartment from whence he had a moment before emerged with the whole meal.

The groom, although he avoided the blow delivered at him, returned it by another, which reached its destination, and precipitated the red-bearded man upon the floor. This incident was but the work of an instant, but it called into action a number of persons, who were partaking of their breakfasts a moment previously in peacefulness; and the end, which was speedily brought about by the arrival of a policeman, was the departure of the red-bearded man in the custody of the latter, upon a charge made by the landlord that he had assaulted him, and had committed considerable damage, for which he determinedly refused to pay.

As soon as he was gone, and peace was restored, the groom, who had slunk mysteriously out of sight, when the policeman entered the



coffee-room, reappeared, and sidling up to Floret, who, terrified and excited, was waiting to pay the small bill she had, with Ida, incurred at this place, he said, in a whisper, and with a kind of knowing nod:

"I beg your parding, Miss, but I will be werry 'spectful to you, Miss. I think I knows you, Miss."

She gazed at him inquiringly, and then returned:

"Impossible. I have never seen you before."

"That's werry likely, Miss," he replied, looking very earnestly at her features, though not rudely. "I can't say as ever I seed you afore; that is jest you, yourself Miss; but I've seed your likeness. Ah! an' it's the werry image on you."

"My likeness!—you are mistaken," responded Floret, coldly; "it was never painted."

She turned away. She did not like to enter into a conversation with any stranger, especially such an individual as the one before her; but she was afraid to repulse him too abruptly, for fear another scene might ensue before she could get away from this no longer secure and comfortable asylum.

"I ain't mistaken, Miss," said the groom, touching his hat; for he preserved a manner of considerable deference. "I ain't mistaken, Miss, in wot I says. Ven I says as I have seen your likeness, I ain't talking o' no painted piter, but a raal vork o' nater, sich as no hart could hever come near. Your likeness, as I seed it, was in raal life, miss, an' in werry high life too. I've seen a lady as is azackly like you, an' she's a marchioness too."

Floret felt as though the whole of the blood in her body congealed slowly in her veins. Like a marchioness! Hagar had spoken only too terribly about her affinity to a marchioness. Did she carry about in her features so remarkable a resemblance to the woman of guilt who had endowed her with shame, that even in a humble place like that in which she now stood, she could be recognized as her offspring? She felt as if she could slink out of the house alone, like one who, having committed a theft, retires with an abject gait from a place where he sees an ominous finger pointed at her. Her cheeks burned, her ears tingled, her eyes were suffused with tears, and she trembled like an aspen.

The sharp, quick eye of the man detected her emotion. He glanced right and left; he looked furtively at Ida, and then he put his finger to his lips.

Almost immediately he said, in a tone which he reduced almost to a whisper:

"I tell you, Miss, I thinks I knows you; an' if you are the party as I spec's you to be, a werry 'ansome thing is lying by for you. It ain't jes' now possibly to say when the ewent may come off, but it is on the cards; and let whatever will 'appen, you can't 'elp pull n' through, becus I can prove you to be vot nobody else dreams on. Lord! Lord! if you

should really be the party as I've often, since a sprig o' lawender von day vispered a vord in my hear, thought as there must be about, you vill come von o' these fine days into von o' the werry best things out; an' wot's more, I can put you into it too. If I doos, o' course I stan's in. I shan't open my mouth werry wide; but I do want a stunnin' pub werry bad. O Jemima!—but that ain't neither 'ere nor there. I must be off, Miss, 'coss I've got some 'crees to look 'ater. You jes' let me know vere I can call upon you, or write to you; ve can vork together, an' ve must bring off von o' the best things vich ever turned up—and bring it off to rights too, an' savin' your presence—no flies."

There was something about this man's words, his looks, his manner, that struck Floret very strongly. His mention of the marchioness, his assertion that he could prove her to be what no other person than himself suspected, and his other inuendoes, gave her an impression that he not only—strange as it might seem—knew something of her history, but that he was in a position to prove that she was not the creature of shame that Hagar had declared her to be. There seemed to be something very preposterous in the thought, it is true; yet, nevertheless, even her young experience taught her that the incidents of real life far surpassed in romance and mystery all the improbabilities that were ever coined in the realms of fiction.

While these thoughts were passing in her mind, the groom cast his eye upon the clock, and said, hastily:

"Be pleased to look sharp, for I ain't got a minnit to spare. Vere shall I be able to find you in a veek or two?"

"I do not know," exclaimed Floret, with an air of embarrassment.

"That's a difficulty, as I ain't no time now to discuss the matter vith you, Miss, vich ve'll get over in this 'ere vay," said the groom, hurriedly. "'Ere's my card, Miss—Natanel Ferret, 'Orse and Groom, Old Bond street. There"—he handed a small card with the above written very legibly, but in a very early style of the art of caligraphy, to her, which she, hardly knowing what to do or what she did, took from him. "There, Miss," he continued, "when you wants to see me, or whenever you are able to let me know vere I can 'ave a little private and werry confidential talk vith you, you drop me a line at that address. It ain't vere I am at service; but it is vere I know noboddy opens my letters and reads vot's in 'em afore I do. Take care on it, you don't know how wallyable it is. Jes' sich a thing as that bit o' card, I shall lay the odds, may go to make a lady o' you, an' a landlurd o' me, vith a party which has got the screemint dark ringlets—But never mind, Miss, take care o' the card, an' until you sees me again, an' go an' sing o' mornings an' nights the lines o' the song—Nil despertandem—never despair."

As he concluded, he touched his hat with

his forefinger, smartly and sharply, and took his departure.

"What a singular person!" observed Ida, as she watched Nat Ferret, for it was that gentleman *in propria persona*, quit the coffee-room, with a highly-gratified smile upon his countenance, flicking his smart and highly-polished top-boot with a riding-whip.

Floret carefully hid away Nat's card, and, turning to Ida, said, without replying to her question:

"Let us leave this place at once."

"I shall only be too happy," rejoined Ida.

Floret summoned the landlord.

He came up with a polite movement of his head.

"I wish to pay you for our accommodation," she said, in a somewhat queenly way which was natural to her.

"I hope that blackguard who annoyed you has not frightened you away," responded the landlord, a little earnestly.

"We must go, if you please," said Ida, a little anxiously.

"Oh, certainly, Miss," replied the landlord.

"We expects this; 'its all come an' go here; that's how we drives a trade. That rascal, notwithstanding', shall have three months, if I know what's what—three months to learn better manners in—"

"What have we to pay?" inquired Floret, urgently, as several fresh customers entered. Being of the opposite sex, their eyes all instantly fell upon her and Ida, and they lingered on their faces, too. Afraid that another recognition yet more unpleasant to her than the last might be made, she was nervously desirous of leaving the house, and therefore repeated her request to know what there was to pay.

"Let me see," said the landlord; "one bed, eighteenpence; no suppers; breakfast, two cups of coffee, threepence; and four thin slices, twopence; no rashers, herrings, no eggs?"

The two girls shook their heads, and the landlord summed up the amount.

"Just one and elevenpence, if you please, miss. Hope you slept well—wool mattress, and everythink perfectly clean, and cheap, too, Miss!"

"We are quite satisfied," responded Floret, in a low tone, and handed him two shillings in payment of an infinitely more moderate bill for hotel accommodation than it is customary to present to the daughter of an earl, and for very much milder accommodation than an earl's daughter would probably have acknowledged herself satisfied with.

The coffee-house keeper returned the penny change with another bow, and Floret receiving it, took up from her seat her small bundle, Ida secured hers at the same time, and then they set forth on their journey—after a phantom.

It was not difficult to find their way to Pimlico; but Floret had, on reaching it, to trust to her memory to enable her to discover the house in which Susan Atten had dwelt, and

many weary paces both she and Ida took in the neighborhood of Ebury street before they could discover the little street in which she had resided with her. Wanderings patiently made, and questions perseveringly put, enabled them, at length to enter Little Elizabeth street, and pause at the door of the house to which Susan had taken Floret on their arrival in London, after their flight from Ascot.

There was a row of four brass bell-knobs upon the side of the door, which were small and kept exceedingly bright. Floret remembered them well; but did not recollect which belonged to Mamma Atten, so she, with a beating heart, laid her small, white trembling fingers upon the first, and rang gently.

The door was, however, promptly answered by a hard-featured woman, whose countenance expressed an impression that she had been called to the door to answer a beseeching appeal of charity, with which it was by no means her intention of sympathizing or responding to. When, however, she saw the two young girls each carrying a bundle, her features underwent a change, and curiosity took the place of pitilessness. Still she did not evidently expect that her visitants had called to inquire after any one residing in the house, and she, therefore, did not ask whom they wanted, but what they wanted.

Floret was about at once to inquire for Mamma Atten, but she felt that there would be something absurd in her inquiring for her under such a name, and she knew not why she felt a reluctance to ask for Miss Atten, and so, after a moment's hesitation, she said:

"I wish to see Susan Atten, if you please."

"Who?" interrogated the woman, sharply.

"Susan Atten," responded Floret, in the same hesitating tone she had at first adopted.

The woman shook her head.

"I don't know her!" she exclaimed, laconically.

"She lived in this house," suggested Floret.

"Never heard the name," answered the woman, curtly.

"For several years," continued Floret, growing anxious, "she occupied a room in this house. I am sure of that!"

"Don't know her," returned the woman.

"She was a dressmaker," urged Floret.

"Not here—no dressmaker in this house—all young men," answered the hard-featured woman.

"Perhaps you are mistaken in the house!" observed Ida to Floret.

"No," returned Floret, quickly. "I am quite sure that this is the house in which she lived."

"How long ago?" asked the woman, in an abrupt tone.

"It is quite three years," returned Floret.

"Ah," replied the woman. "That'll do. I have been here a year and a half, and the house had been empty a year when I took it. I think I did hear something when I was about it, concerning a young woman who died of the



small-pox, or a broken heart, or went to America, I forget which; but I knows nothing about her. Anything more to say to me? for I'm getting my things ready for the mangle, and the man will be here for them before I'm ready for him, unless I look sharp!"

Floret felt sorely disappointed; she did not know what to say, or what to do.

"Did you know any one else living in the house?" suggested Ida. "If you did, perhaps we might find that person out!"

Floret's face brightened.

"Yes," she said, quickly; "there was a Miss Marr—a Miss Harriet Marr. She was a governess, and taught music. Do you recollect the name?" she inquired of the woman, earnestly.

"Lord, no!" she replied, almost testily. "Don't I tell you that the house was empty when I took it? I know nothing of nobody that was in it before me!"

"Do you think any person in the neighborhood would know where the persons of whom I speak have gone?" inquired Floret.

"How can I tell?" returned the woman.

"You had better ask about at the shops!"

"I expected," said Floret, "to be able to rent an apartment in the same house with Susan Atten, or, at least, in one situated near to her. I do not know what to do now!"

"A bedroom furnished, I suppose?" said the woman, quickly.

"Yes," answered Floret. "Have you one to let to us for a short time?"

"A short time?" iterated the woman, as if the expression were not altogether satisfactory to her; and then added: "Well, I have one to let, certainly; but what references have you?"

"References?" echoed Floret, with surprise; "what do you mean?"

The woman opened her eyes.

"My house is pretty near full of respectable young men," she said, with a slight toss of the head, "and it won't do for me to take in anybody that I knows nothing about. Who are you?—what's your name?—who are your friends?—where do you come from?—that's what I mean by references."

What a series of questions for Floret to answer! Her heart died within her. How could she reply to any of them?

The woman observed her turn red, and then pale, and appear embarrassed, and said, sharply:

"Ain't you going to answer my questions?"

"I must decline to answer them," she replied, faintly; and added: "I thought that, if I kept my rent paid, it would matter very little to any one who I was."

"Wouldn't it?" rejoined the woman, quickly. "It would to me, I should think. Besides, what luggage have you got?"

Floret looked at her somewhat aghast, as she put the question:

"I suppose them bundles contain all your wardrobes, eh?" continued the woman, pointing to the small bundles which they carried.

Floret bent her head assentingly; and then the woman, raising her voice wrathfully, said:

"Why, I never met with a couple of more artful, barefaced baggages in my life. What do you mean by coming here to me with a cock-and-bull story about a woman that's dead long ago, in order that you may sneak into my house, get into my debt, perhaps ruin my young-men lodgers, and turn the whole place topsy-turvy? I wish a policeman would only just come out of one of them areas in Eaton square; I'd give you in charge to him; troop off with you while your shoes are as good as they're likely to be. Be off with you. I won't let you no bedroom, nor more, will anybody else, with them twopenny-halfpenny bundles; so don't try on, or you'll get locked up in prison before the night comes. Be off with y u, and don't you come ringing honest people's bells again, you shameless hussies, don't."

A small crowd, attracted by the woman's vulgar volubility, had begun to assemble, and Floret, with a frightened look, catching Ida's hand tightly in her own, turned away and quitted the doorway.

She overheard the woman for a minute continue her vituperation; and then she heard the street-door closed with a loud bang. It sounded on her heart as if the world had shut its door upon her for ever.

Whither were they now to direct their steps? Without name, property, or references, what respectable persons would admit them into their houses? Floret felt the full force, and even the justice of the woman's observation; but, nevertheless, if the assumption were to be borne out by facts, where were they to look for shelter?

Ida was silent. The woman's remarks had fallen upon her heart, as if every word was a blow from a bar of iron, and would slay her.

She felt as strongly and as deeply as Floret, that she was a nameless, homeless outcast. She had not, it is true, eating into her soul that cancer which Hagar Lot had set up in Floret's; but she felt acutely the utter desolation of her position.

They walked slowly on; each with a heart far too full of sorrow to speak. Each having a dim, vague impression that their bed that night would be on the cold, hard stones beneath the deep waters of the river which they had passed in the morning on their way to Pimlico.

But all unconscious that they were being followed.

A stout woman with a swarthy complexion, who was habited in a rich *moiré-antique* dress, over which was hung, with loose vulgarity, a gaudy Indian shawl, who had upon her head a large bonnet, trimmed with a profusion of flowers, who had long earrings in her ears, huge bracelets on her wrists, long gold chains about her neck, many rings upon her fingers, and was otherwise expensively, but what is expressively termed flashily dressed, was passing, as the woman in Little

Elizabeth street was pouring forth her torrent of invective upon the two poor girls.

She stopped and overheard part of what was said. She scrutinized the faces and forms of Floret and Ida with much critical acumen. She hung back until the woman had finished her torrent of abuse and slammed the door, then she slowly and cautiously followed two of the sweetest creatures she had ever seen during the course of a long and infamous career

## CHAPTER XIX

"Tread softly through these amorous rooms;

Tread softly—softly like the foot

Of winter, shod with fleecy snow,  
Who cometh white and cold and mute,  
Lest he should wake the Spring below.  
Oh, look!—for here lie Love and Youth,  
Fair Spirits of the heart and mind;  
Alas! that one should ever stray from truth;  
And one—be ever, ever, ever blind!"

—BARRY CORNWALL.

Although the reception of Floret and Ida by the woman who occupied the house in Little Elizabeth street, in which Susan Atten had formerly resided, and her subsequent coarse and brutal repulse of them filled both with a blank despair, there was still a difference in the emotions which the untoward incident had raised in their young bosoms.

Ida felt as if she had been suddenly hurled from a pleasant world, radiant with sunshine, into an unknown region of profound darkness.

This was not exactly the case with Floret. She felt herself reduced to an extremity by the conduct of the woman who owned the house in which she expected to have found an asylum, and that extremity was akin to despair. But she had already been plunged into a condition of hopeless despair by Hagar Lot, which the hint of Nat Ferret had perhaps agitated in a slightly favorable degree, and which it was not in the power of the individual whose inhospitable door she had just quitted to deepen. She felt at a loss, indeed, where to go, or what to do.

Before she could make an effort to rouse her dormant energies to even speculate what would be the best course for them to attempt to pursue, under the unhappy circumstances in which they were placed, she became conscious of a great rustling of silk near to her, of a very strong odor of crape, and funerals, and grave-clothes combined into one scent, and an unmistakable panting of breath.

She turned round, and beheld by her side, the stout, gorgeously-arrayed, and repulsive-looking woman mentioned in the last chapter.

At first, Floret's impression was, that notwithstanding the Daddy's assertion that she was dead, she saw before her the Grannam, disguised in brilliant attire; but the next moment she was satisfied that she was mistaken, and that the woman, who was evidently about to speak to her, was an entire stranger to her.

As the person laid hold of her mantle, Floret looked up in her face, and the woman smiled and winked both eyes with evident approbation and admiration.

"My dear child," she said, with the accents of one who, afflicted with short breath, spoke through a half-choked bugle-horn, "accuse me—I want to speak to you a minit, which it will be for your good, I'm sure; don't walk quite so fast. There ain't no partiklar 'urry, as the man said when they was taking him to be hanged—he, he, he—which a'course it's wrong in a foolish old thing like me to talk in sich a way to you; but there, I see you're dull, or else I'd give you a religius trac' to read. I allus carries 'em about with me. 'The sprinklin' shower for weak blades' is a werry neat thing in trac's, an' werry pooty, werry pooty indeed, and chuckfull of immoral deflections, But Lor' I can see that neither o' you young gals are in the mind to read such things jest now. Trac's is werry good things when you've got the bile werry bad, and don't want nuthin' to distrac' your mind, you can go through 'em then, from A to amperseand, and think of lots of other things as well. I t-t-t-t-t, what am I talking about? Lor' bless me, you will think I've gone out of my mind. You must accuse me, but I want to have a word or two with you two young, poor, forlorn things."

Floret felt an instinctive repugnance to the woman, although she saw that she evidently tried to make her tone in addressing them both kind and friendly. She therefore said, coldly:

"What can you, Madam, possibly have to say to myself and my friend?"

The woman again glanced at her with delighted admiration, as Floret, keenly sensitive of her forlorn condition, drew herself proudly up. She was stung to find that her apparel proclaimed the poverty of her condition.

"A good deal—a good deal!" the strange woman responded, quickly; "werry much more to your advantage than you aspects, I know. You're born to be a Countess, I'll swear; only dress you in satins, jewels, and feathers, and there isn't a court-lady would come near you. But look here, we'll talk about that by an' by. Now, I wish to be a friend to you poor little things, an' I'll tell you why! I happened to come up to you just as you was asking that beast of a hussy you was talking to to let you a bed-room, and she refused. Now, I suppose you are strangers in London?"

"We are," said Floret.

"And you want lodgings?" continued the woman, looking at the pair with a smile, but with the eyes of a vulture.

"We do," responded Floret.

"Yes—yes," rejoined the woman, nodding her head; "and you ain't provided with references."

"No," said Floret, dropping her head slightly.

"Respectable; but ain't got nobody as you could azackly give at a minit's notice to speak to your characters, eh?" artfully suggested the woman, trying to make her face resemble as little as possible that of a merciless bird of prey.



"You have correctly surmised our situation," answered Floret.

"Besides, you have your reasons—quite innocent ones, I am sure—for not letting your friends know where you are for a little while."

Floret bent her head, but did not reply.

"Ah!—I see, I see!" said the woman, quickly, and with well-affected liberality of sentiment. "They've been unkind to you, or you have displeased them in some trifling way. They have been harsh to you—and have removed yourselves from 'em for a short time. Yes—yes, it's all as plain as a pikestaff. Now, I tell you what, you've been an' done a werry foolish thing—a werry dangerous thing, to come up here to London alone along of only your two selves. It's a 'orrible place London is, which so is Paris; but that's neither 'ere nor there—I've a trac' on the wickedness of London—I thinks it calls it Gomorror, and pints out 'ow some day it will set on fire with—with—the stuff they makes lucifer matches on—it's brimstone, I believe; but that ain't the name I means. Never mind, but what I wants to say is, that London is a dreadful wicked place, and it isn't one, which I am sure it ain't for two young, friendless gals like you to wander about in. Lor' bless you, dears, I've gals of my own, and I knows the duty of a mother as well as any woman, 'ere or abroad, and I'll back myself at odds that I'm best at it—but what am I sayin', a sickenin' and disgustin' you with my own praises, which I oughtn't to praise myself—for, for I've enough as does it for me; but what I'm goin' to say is, I can't bear the thoughts of you two poor little dears wandering about in search of lodgin's, which I don't think you'll get any, for who, but one with a 'art like mine, would let you into their 'ouses. No—no, this is a hard, selfish, unfeeling, wicked world, and the best of us is, as one of my trac's says, but a werry rank piece of garbage. Well, then, I 'appen to have a spare bed-room in my house, which it ain't no great ways from here, and you can have that until you go back to your friends, or you can find a place you may like better than mine, and where it will suit you to live. What do you think of that, eh?"

"O, how kind of you—how very kind of you!" exclaimed Ida, in a perfect ecstasy of delight. She believed the dreadful problem of what they were to do or where to go was thus unexpectedly solved, and solved gratifyingly, for certainly a woman so beautifully dressed as she was must surely own a nice house.

Floret, however, hesitated. She recognized the value of the woman's garments; but her face, her form, her manner, her language, was that of one who had moved in society's lowest grades; and though she could not comprehend the nature of any harm which could attend them through accepting this person's seemingly very kind invitation, yet some small warning voice within her breast seemed to cry out to her:

"Avoid this creature; do not trust yourself with her. If you do, you will be lost forever."

The woman observed her hesitation; she perceived, too, that she seemed to be more experienced and more reflective than Ida, and she said, quickly:

"Don't make any mistake, my dear. If you think lodgin's is easy to be got, and people is eager to take in young gals like yourself, with no references and small bundles, don't you listen to me. I shan't be the loser if you don't take my offer; but I tell you, I'm a mother of half-a-dozen gals—nice gals, too, most on 'em older than yourself. An' it would break my 'art, if I thought any ene on 'em had to trapes the streets of London in search of what they won't find, and find what they warn't search on. No, Miss, that's my only reason in makin' you the offer of shelter for a night or two with a comfortable bedroom, and the company of some nice gals about your ownage. Don't come if you don't wish; but if you'd be advised by me, you'll except my offer. I should ha' jumped at it had I been a young girl atout friends in London. What do you say, Miss?"

The last question was addressed to Ida, who instantly replied—

"Oh! I think it is so very kind."

Ay! that was it! It was so very kind. Floret had not previously found that the members of the world were so kind one to another—at least when they were strangers to each other. She remembered many pithy sentences of the Daddy, which went to show that when a stranger is particularly anxious to serve you, distrust him. Violent friendships, like love, are never worth much if formed at first sight; and there was something in this woman's singularly generous offer, which, coupled with a coarseness of manner and vulgarity of speech, made Flora shrink from accepting it.

Yet she could not conceal from herself that it would be very difficult for her to meet with a house where herself and Ida, friendless and unknown, would be accepted as tenants, and she could not comprehend what harm could befall either of them, if for a few days they accepted the generous hospitality tendered to them by the stranger.

She sighed deeply two or three times, and was perplexed what to do. It was her custom to act promptly, and to adopt the course which, at the first blush, seemed to be the best. Her impulse was to reject, emphatically, the stranger's offer.

But she hesitated.

The woman knew the value to her of that hesitation, and she said, quickly:

"There, there, go your ways, child, and I will go mine. I only made you a offer for your good, not for mine. What am I to get for takin' you in an' 'owsin' you, an feedin' you, an sleepin' you? Satisfaction! Yes, my dear, the satisfaction of a 'art which knows as it has been and gone and done its duty."



I'm a Samaritan, I am. As one o' them bootiful trac's, which I'm sorry I left 'em all at 'ome, says—it's called, I think, "Bits of Fat for Famished Wolves"—I was 'ungry, an you fed me; I was naked, an' you clothed me. I was 'ouseless, and you took me in.' That'll be my satisfaction. Ven you leaves me, you'll kies me, an' say that to me, and I shall have the virtuous 'appiness o' knowin' that I did take you in an' clothe you, an' all that, and that will be my reward."

Ida placed her hand on Floret's shoulder, and said to her:

"Shall we not go with this kind lady? When we settle, and are able to work, we can soon repay her for her goodness, you know, dear Eth."

"Is it your wish, Ida, that we should accept this obligation?" inquired Floret of her, in a low tone, but impressively.

"I am so dejected, so miserable, in our present incertitude," answered Ida.

"Have you no feeling rising up in your bosom which urges you to decline the proffer this lady so very kindly makes to us?" she continued, in the same earnest tone.

Ida made an uneasy kind of movement, as if she was perplexed in her mind, but yet ready to take what appeared to her to be the least of two evils.

"I we reject it, what are we to do?" she inquired, anxiously.

"We are in the hands of Heaven!" exclaimed Floret, in a tone which chilled Ida's heart, it was so like that of one who had parted with every hope.

The woman overheard every word they uttered, though she pretended not to listen to them; but as Floret uttered this ejaculation, she turned to her, and said:

"If we wasn't in the street, I'd throw my arms round your dear neck, and kiss you, my child. Well, if nothing comes on it, I am werry glad I made you the offer, and I ain't a bit angry that you doesn't jump at it. No, I respects an' admires you both, because you hangs back about comin' home with me. Quite right, my dears—quite right, for you knows nothin' of me any more than I does of you, an', therefore, why should you trust me? Well, there's no harm done, is there? an' so, good-bye, my dears, and I hope that you'll find lodgin's—before the week's out, I'd almost said, but before twelve o'clock to-night comes, and the perliceman locks you up for wandering about the streets as rogues and wagatones. Good-bye!" She turned slowly away, but Ida gently arrested her.

"Say for a moment, if you please, Madam," she exclaimed. "I do—I do not think that we have yet decided."

"Ah, but you must be quick, my dear, for I can't wait," said the old woman, with a slight trace of sharpness in her voice. "You must remember, I am trying to do you a kindness, and you can't expect me to wait here all day, while you're thinking whether you'll accept it or not."

Ida looked beseechingly at Floret, and Floret almost immediately said to the woman:

"You will excuse our reluctance; but we are such strangers to London and its ways, that we do not know really what it is proper to do; still, you have made to us an offer which seems to be dictated in a spirit of motherly kindness—"

"Of course," interposed the woman; "motherly kindness, that's all—'tain't nothing else!"

"An offer, which at this moment would be unspcakably accepted by us, if we felt quite certain that we ought to avail ourselves of it," continued Floret; "but we are all of us subject to be placed in situations in which it is necessary to judge for ourselves the path to take, which leads either to good or evil; and we too often err in the selection. In this case, the choice seems simple enough, and we will elect to make that which will place us beneath your roof until we are able to obtain a small and humble home for ourselves. And at the same time, I do not know how to be sufficiently grateful to you for the goodness which has led you to take such notice of us, and to proffer to us service which at this moment is particularly valuable to us."

"Don't say another word, my dears," exclaimed the old woman, with a smile of extreme gratification. "We are not far from my home, and when we gets there you'll find yourselves as welcome as the flowers in May."

A cab happened to be passing at the moment, and the old woman hailed the driver, who, being disengaged, drew up his vehicle, which was made to carry four, to the kerb stone.

"I can't walk far," she said, as a kind of excuse for engaging the vehicle, "and, besides, I darsay you gals are sick of carrying your bundles."

They all got in, and the cabman, with a peculiar grin, said to the stout woman:

"To the 'stablishment, I s'pose, mum?"

"Yes, home; private door, cabby," she returned.

These observations grated on Floret's ear, and she seemed to feel that she was committing an error; but a glance at Ida's face reassured her, it looked so pleased and smiling. A thought ran through her mind that it was her own deep-seated unhappiness which gave a gloomy tone to her impressions, and she tried to make herself believe that the meeting with the singular woman whom they were accompanying home was an interposition of Providence in their favor.

They reached, after a short drive, a street, in which the houses had a particularly new aspect, and were apparently of a very respectable class. At the side entrance of one of them, the cab-driver drew up, and alighting, rang a small bell which was let in the doorposts, and over which was painted the word "servants".

The door was opened by a man who was dressed in a green livery adorned with silver



face, but he was, nevertheless, not a smart-looking man. He had short, dull red hair, a low forehead, small eyes, high cheek-bones, massive jaw-bones and chin; was of a yellow complexion, and profusely pocket-fritten. He was square built, and was evidently possessed of great strength, and looked very much more like a prize-fighter than a page.

He glanced quickly, furtively, and scrutinizingly at the girls as they entered, but made a show of respect, which, however, was both slovenly and awkwardly done; and then he went out and paid the cabman his fare, while the stout woman conducted Floret and Ida up a narrow flight of stairs, and passed through a door, which admitted them to a spacious building.

Both Floret and Ida were struck with surprise. Beneath them descended a wide staircase, carpeted and drugeted, to the hall, which was capacious, and contained hall-chairs, table, and handsome mats. On each side of the door were stained-glass windows, from the ceiling depended a huge lamp of stained glass and ormolu, and ranged against the wall were short pillars of variegated marbles, upon which were sculptured busts of females. Above them the stairs ascended, carpeted and drugeted in the same handsome fashion, the hand-rails being of polished mahogany, and the balustrades of pure white, picked out with gold.

It was clear that the house was beautifully furnished, and belonged to some one possessed of ample means. Floret felt frightened—she did not comprehend why—and Ida felt awed instinctively, without knowing wherefore, she wisbed herself far away.

"Now, dears," said the old woman, in a bustling, cheery tone, "I'll take you into the bedroom of my youngest gal; she's out, I know; but you can put yourself to rights a bit there, while I order a room to be got ready for you."

So saying, she conducted them up another flight of stairs, and opening a room-door, she ushered them in.

It was a bedroom, furnished with almost regal magnificence. It was carpeted with a rich, yielding Turkey carpet. The bedstead—a massive rosewood Arabian, superbly carved—was decorated with pale blue and white-flowered satin furniture, lined with white; the coverlet was of white quilted silk, edged with lace; and the pillows were covered with cases of lawn, edged with lace. The toilet-glass and table and the cheval-glass were trimmed with white muslin and lace. There were easy-chairs and couches, covered with the same pale blue and white-flowered satin damask.

But, although the room was beautifully and luxuriantly furnished, there was a curious air of loose disorder reigning about it, which deteriorated its magnificence greatly. Upon the toilet table were China pots, exquisitely painted, cut-glass bottles of all colors, paper boxes, combs of many kinds, brushes of all sizes,

hand-glasses, soiled gloves, jewelry of various kinds, from massive chains, brooches, bracelets, to a plain and apparently valueless ring. Dead and dying flowers were strewed about, mixed up with cards of address, all huddled together in strange confusion.

About the room, flung upon chairs or couches, and upon the floor, were articles of female attire. Some were superb silk robes, others were petticoats and various kinds of underclothing; while in corners were many pairs of female boots and shoes—white, bronze, and black—of various makes. There were slippers, too, of fancy materials, thrown heedlessly about; and, in short, numberless things all lying about in disorder, as if the owner did not prize them, and had cast them from her, in weariness and disgust, the moment she had removed them from her person.

The old woman noticed the look of surprise with which Ida and Floret observed the state of the apartment, and said, hastily:

"My Florence is such a careless, reckless creature—and she takes no pride in anything; never minds a bit what they costes, but tosses 'em 'ere an' there, jest as the humor seizes her. Ah! I tells her often enough, light come, light go—she'll live to want 'em! You see, dears, she's a beautiful gal, an' a wonderful favorite with the gentlemen. We've werry fast-rate connections, who calls to see us—dukes and lords, I assure you—an' they none of 'em comes without bringing Florence a gold bracelet or a dimint brooch, at least. But we can't stay here. The room I intends to put you in can't be more untidy than this; and it'll be your own, gals, 'till I can get you a better one ready."

She rang a bell at the side of the fireplace sharply, and almost immediately a woman, about thirty years of age, appeared at the door. She was rather untidily dressed, and looked sorrowful, as though late nights were the rule of her life.

"Is the peach room a little tidy?" inquired the stout woman of her.

"Yes'm," she said, quickly; "we've been settin' it to rights, and we've jest finished it."

"O, I'm glad of that!" she remarked, with a pleased smile. "Go an' get the door open, we want to occupy it, don't we, dears?"

Floret and Ida did not reply; they both felt a growing uneasiness, which everything they saw tended to increase. The old woman, however, did not wait for their answer, but she conducted them to the "peach room."

On entering it, they found that it was furnished in a very much humbler style than the one they had just quitted, but it was very clean and in perfect order. It presented a very favorable contrast to the first one.

"Now, loves, you can make yourselves at home here for a day or two," observed the "Samaritan." "We shall do something better for you by and bye. You will call me, while you stay, mother. What shall I call you?"



"My name is Ida, and my dear, dear friend's name is Edith," said Ida, readily.

"Very pretty names," said the stout lady, musingly; "but they'll do, I dare say. Blanche is more of a favorite than Edith; but never mind, we'll talk about that by and by. Now, dears, I'll send you up something to eat, and mind what I say to you. Don't on no account let anybody into your room but me and Sarah, and don't, on any account whatever, come out of your room without my express permission; keep your door locked inside, dears—keep your door locked and bolted. I'll tell you why another time. Make yourselves at home, dears. I'll come back to you by and by. Good-bye for the present—good-bye, loves. I'll send Sarah up with some cold chicken and a bottle of sherry for you in half a twink—good-bye, loves. Be sure you keep your door locked and bolted!"

And with the last admonition on her lips, she waddled out of the room, closing the door behind her.

"This is a strange place!" exclaimed Floret, gazing around her, and speaking reflectively.

"I am frightened!" said Ida, throwing her arms about her neck. "I wish we had not come into it!"

## CHAPTER XX.

"Let us go forth and tread down fate together,  
We'll be companions of the ghastly winds;  
Laugh loud at hunger; conquer want; outcure  
The fierceness of the howling wilderness.  
Firm here, or bolder onward, that's our way.  
He who gives back a foot, gives vantage-ground  
To whatsoever is his enemy."—BARRY CORNWALL.

Nature, at the same time that she provides Innocence with a sense of impending evil—not always, alas! a protecting instinct—sometimes also furnishes her with a feeling of repugnance to the object from whom the evil is likely to come. Ida regarded the professions of the woman who desired that she might be called "mother", as those of one who was truly Christian and philanthropic, and in her desolate condition she was most anxious to avail herself of all they promised, for just so long as it might take to get herself and Floret fairly started in the world. In spite, nevertheless, of her solicitude to follow what appeared simply to be the counsels of prudence and common sense, there was something in the look and manner of the woman who had affected the display of such disinterested generosity, which made her shrink from her with a shudder, and to regard her with an indefinite species of loathing, for which she inwardly reproved herself, and which, the more she tried to reason mentally against it, seemed to grow stronger.

Floret was affected, too, but not exactly in the same fashion. From the moment that half a dozen sentences had fallen from the lips of the woman who had allured them beneath her roof, she mistrusted her.

Floret, therefore, within a few minutes after the departure of the hostess, decided

that they ought to follow the promptings of their instincts, and quit their new-found asylum at once, without further consideration of the matter.

In compliance with the "mother's" suggestions, Ida had, on her quitting the room, impulsively locked and bolted the door. Floret now unfastened it without noise, so that they might quietly depart from the house, avoid all discussion with the "mother", and also a meeting with any of her daughters, if they should happen to be moving about the house.

To Floret's dismay, she found that the door was fastened without as well as inside, and that the lock which was placed on the outside had no connection with that she had been instructed to use for their protection. She used all her strength to force the door, but without making any impression upon it. Ida lent her assistance, but with no better effect. They were locked in, and escape from the door was, therefore, for the present, at least, impracticable.

They now discovered, for the first time, and greatly to their surprise, that there were no windows to their room. It was lighted by what is termed a lantern ceiling, which, while it filled from above the room with quite as much, if not more, light than the ordinary mode, was yet inaccessible to the reach without a tall ladder, and it had the advantage of not being overlooked from any other building.

Ida was disposed to give way to hysterical terror, but Floret's courage rose with the occasion. She was conscious that, with resolute energy and determined will, a tolerable opposition might be set up against any attempt to coerce them into acts which would be repugnant to their dispositions, and to their knowledge of right. She was conscious, too, that their power to act would be impeded and hampered by useless tears and by vague fears, none of which might have the least foundation in fact. She therefore nerved herself to face the new trial she was called upon to encounter, and applied herself at once to the task of calming Ida's agitation, and of urging her to exert all the courage she possessed, in order that, the moment an opportunity of delivering themselves from their present singular thralldom arrived, they might be prepared to seize it.

While thus engaged they heard a key turned in the lock without, followed by a gentle tapping at the door. Ida turned as white as death, and shrunk timidly a few paces back from the spot on which she had been standing. Floret, on the contrary, although she felt her heart beat rapidly, approached the door and listened. The tapping, after a moment's cessation, was repeated, and then a voice whispered, through the keyhole:

"Young ladies, be good enough to let me in."

The knocking was again repeated, and the same voice repeated:

"Don't be afraid, young ladies, it's only me, Sarah; I've brought something for you."



Floret, then, catching up her small bundle, motioning Ida to join her with hers, which she did with alacrity, cautiously opened the door. Too cautiously, as it happened, for the servant, Sarah, glided in with a tray, and giving the door a smart kick back with her heel, it closed with a loud click.

Floret instantly, however, turned the handle; but the door was fast: she could not open it.

The servant, with a sidelong glance, observed her, and a curious smile of satisfaction pursed up her lips. She did not say anything, however, until she had placed the tray, which contained a very attractive-looking small repast, upon the table, and then she turned and surveyed them both.

"Well, la! I declare," she exclaimed, with affected wonder, "why, you haven't ever taken off your bonnets and cloaks, and put them nasty troublesome little bundles out of your hands since you have been here. How angry missus would be if she were to know it."

"We are much obliged to your mistress for her kind intentions toward us," observed Floret, with a serious and decided tone; "but, after some very careful and anxious consideration, we have decided not to trouble her further, and to take our departure from this house."

The woman gazed at her, and raised her hands with well simulated amazement.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed. "What, do you mean to say you want to go away before you have had a chance of knowing what a charming place you are in?"

"Yes," said Ida, urgently; "please to let us go. We have no desire to stay here a moment longer—even if it were twenty times more charming than you intimate that it is."

"Why do you wish to go, young ladies?" inquired the woman, artfully. "Has anything happened to disturb you since you have come here? If so, perhaps I can explain it. You came here of your own free wills—didn't you?"

"I cannot see," responded Floret, coldly, "that it is necessary to furnish you with any explanation of the cause which makes us wish to depart. It must be surely enough for you, at least, that we wish to leave."

"No, young lady, it is not!" returned the servant, emphatically. "Missus has behaved very kind to both of you, and you know it; but she hasn't yet had the chance of being half nor a quarterso kind as she intends to be, and, therefore, if I was to let you go away without giving her any rhyme or reason for it, what do you think she'd say to me? She ain't used to have her kindness flung in her face in this way, and I ain't going to be no party to it; so you'd both of you better take off your bonnets and cloaks, and sit down to that beautiful cold chicken and sherry, which I have brought you by missus's orders, for I certainly shan't let you go away without she bids me to it!"

"Where is your mistress?" inquired Floret, in a commanding tone, which did not seem to have any effect upon the woman.

"Gone out," she said, pertly.

"We are to be prisoners here, I am to understand?" said Floret, sternly.

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Prisoners is strong words; but you certain, won't be allowed to go away until she comes back," she replied; and when that will be, is quite uncertain. She might return in an hour; she might not come back for a week, if anything unexpected took her off in the country; so you young ladies had better make up your minds to be contented and happy. You will be well taken care of here; you may rest sure of that. Take off your things—do, there's dear, good ladies, and eat your lunch; it will do you good, and it can't do you no harm. You may, when you think of it, just as well take it, because nothing whatever can be done until missus comes back."

Floret turned away from her without reply. She was perplexed. She knew not what step to take. The woman followed her, and, in a coaxing tone, said:

"Do take my advice, make yourselves comfortable, and when missus comes home, no doubt, if you wants to go, she'll let you go."

"Do you refuse to permit us to leave this place?" inquired Floret, turning sharply to her, and speaking with excitement.

"I've nothing to do with it. I'm but a poor servant, and must do what I am told by those who employ me."

She suddenly darted to the door, and, with dexterity, used a small key, opened the spring-lock, glided through the partly-opened door, fastened it after her, and descended swiftly to the lower part of the house.

What was now to be done; they were locked in as before, and their chance of departure more remote than ever.

Again and again they discussed their position. Why were they locked in? If the mistress of the house had no other than kind intentions toward them, why not give them the liberty of moving freely about the house, or at least the opportunity of moving freely about the house, or at least the opportunity of entering even one of the sitting-rooms. Why confine them at the top of the house? Why bid them lock and bolt their chamber-door, and refuse admittance to all persons except herself and her servant? What persons? Of whom were they to be afraid—and why would they have occasion to fear them?

It may be easily understood how difficult both Floret and Ida found it to furnish an answer to even one of these questions, and how wretched and bewildered their fruitless endeavors left them.

Forlorn, helpless, and friendless, nothing was left to them but to wait the issue of events. Neither of them touched the food which had been brought to them. They seemed by tacit consent to shun it—they sat close to each other, hand in hand, conferring in a low tone, and wearying their already aching brains by fruitless speculations.

The day wore on long and drearily, and the



gradual diminution of light from above told them that the sun was rapidly sinking in the west, and would, no doubt, go down and leave them in darkness, and still in their prison-chamber. They were faint from long fasting; but they did not even look at the food—tempting as it really appeared—they only wept in each other's arms, when the prospect of escape became hopeless, and prayed earnestly for the interposition of Heaven to effect that deliverance which seemed denied to them by human agency.

And while thus tearfully engaged, the fragrant odor—fragrant to the olfactory sense of the famished—of a rich dinner being cooked, gradually permeated through the crevices of the door and the keyhole, and filled the apartment. They guessed that the dining-hour was approaching, and they imagined that the woman who had inveigled them into her clutches would probably return to her home, visit their chamber, and finding them resolutely bent on not remaining beneath her roof, would throw open their prison-doors, and suffer them to depart.

But no, some time elapsed, and no footsteps approached their room, although they listened with intense and breathless attention.

But, though disappointed in their yearning wishes, though no sound reached their ears, they almost imperceptibly discovered that the pleasant odor of viands being cooked was changing into a smoky scent. Shortly afterward, they noticed a dull, suffocating vapor gradually filling the apartment, impeding their breathing, and obscuring their vision.

And in the direction of the chimney-piece, they heard a dull, booming, roaring sound, as though a mighty wind was tearing up the adjoining chimney.

And then a strange red glare seemed to spread itself over their room from the lantern-window above; and, looking up, they, to their horror, beheld large volumes of smoke rolling and wreathing in dense masses around their window-panes, in which were perceptible large flakes of incandescent matter.

Then, within the house there suddenly rose up a succession of piercing shrieks, the hurrying of feet, and the slamming violently of doors.

And without the house, and in the streets, there was a hoarse roar of voices, some shrill cries, and the rolling of some heavy vehicles.

A frightful conviction flashed through the minds of both.

The house was on fire!

Simultaneously they rushed at the door, and pulled at the handle. It was still locked on the outside. With all their strength they shook it, tugged at it, dashed their feet against the panel, but without making the slightest impression upon it.

They screamed for help—screamed with the energy of a mad despair. They had a few minutes previously tacitly wished for death to relieve them from their afflictions—and here it was advancing in its most terrible form, actu-

ally staring them in the face, and they tried, with frantic endeavors, to escape from its horrible embrace.

But they both became exhausted, powerless, almost senseless; and the door remained still firm against any and every effort to force it.

The roaring sound in the chimney increased frightfully; the wild confusion within the house itself, mingled as it was with yells and screams, grew demoniac; the tumult without the house each moment became greater—sounds, as of some violent battering, were added to the disorder, and, within their chamber, the vapor grew slowly but surely denser, and more impossible of being breathed; but no footsteps approached their chamber to save them, no friendly hand unlocked the door to afford them the opportunity of flying for their lives.

Ida became rapidly almost delirious. Floret, at the first moment that a conviction that the house was on fire took possession of her, felt half-frenzied, but as the impossibility of escape, and the certainty of death swiftly forced themselves upon her mind, she did not hesitate, but twined her arms about Ida, forced her upon her knees, and bade her join with her in earnest prayer to Him in whose dread presence they would probably shortly stand, imploring Him to receive their souls mercifully.

It was hard to die so young—hard to die a death so frightful—but there appeared to be no help for it, and Ida, awakened to a sense that her last moments were at hand, mingled her prayers with Floret's, and tried to meet the apparently inevitable result with calmness, resignation, and a firm hope that, with this last fiery ordeal, their trials and their sorrows would end for ever—and ever.

Their power to breathe was fast departing, their eyesight was leaving them, in their ears only was one wild, rushing, ringing sound; they were sinking gradually into that sleep from which they would never awaken on earth, when they were both startled by a tremendous crash upon the door, close to which they were kneeling.

It was followed by a hoarse voice without, exclaiming, in loud tones:

"Is there any one in this room?"

Both Floret and Ida tried to scream, but their lungs were full of smoke, and they could make no sound. They each, with the desperate endeavors which a renewed hope of life would make them employ, repeated their attempts, but vainly.

They heard the question which had partly resuscitated them repeated urgently, accompanied by some heavy blows on the door; and then Floret, half-maddened by the prospect of losing this chance of deliverance, made one almost superhuman effort, and forced a faint shriek, feeble in its sound, from her throat.

But it was heard! An attempt was made to dash the door open, but it would not yield; and then the same voice as before, rendered deep and sonorous by the imminence of the



danger in which they were placed, cried: "Stand back!—stand clear!"

Then fell the swift, heavy blows of an axe upon the door—a hailstorm of blows—the wood shivered, split into fragments at the spot where the locks had been attached, and after this hurricane, occupying a briefer time than it has taken to relate, ceased, a heavy body was flung violently against the door: it bent, cracked, held its own tenaciously, and then, on the repetition of the dash against it, it fell in with a crash, a complete wreck.

In the doorway, in a black helmet and dark dress, stood a grim-looking man, but stood only for a moment.

At his feet he saw the half-senseless girls, without the strength to move a limb. He waited to put no questions to them, for the flames were ascending the staircase with a blinding glare, and showers of fiery sparks were darting up, coruscating, glittering, dancing, and wreathing, as though they were rejoicing over their work of destruction.

The powerful fellow lifted both girls from the floor, one in each arm, and bore them from the room into one adjoining, for all escape by the staircase was cut off.

Here was an open window looking into the street, and against the edge of the window still rested a fire-escape—that most valuable of all valuable inventions. The brave fellow who had taken charge of the fainting girls proceeded with his work of deliverance calmly and skilfully, though without the loss of one instant's precious time.

He lowered Ida carefully to the arms of those who were waiting below, with generous philanthropy and intense impatience, to receive those who were to be saved, and he descended with Floret.

As he reached the ground, there was a stentorian cheer from a swaying, thronging multitude.

It was followed by a wild shout, a dull, heavy crash, the tossing into the air of myriads of fiery sparks, and the leaping and flashing of a thousand flames.

The roof had fallen in!

The gallant conductor of the fire-escape had not completed his work of mercy a moment too soon.

Bewildered, blinded, trembling, scarcely conscious, Floret and Ida were conveyed to a neighboring tavern, where every attention was kindly paid to them, and restoratives were given by a medical gentleman, who had been called in to attend them, and who soon reported that, though much frightened and half-suffocated, they were in no danger—that they only required a few days' rest, careful attendance, and nice, nourishing diet to restore them to health again.

Floret covered her face with her hands and wept bitterly as she heard those words.

A few days' rest! Where were they to obtain them? Nourishing diet! How were they to get it? Their bundles containing the whole of the money they possessed, and all

their worldly goods, were consumed by the fire.

They were not only still homeless, but they were now utterly penniless.

The medical practitioner observed her tears, and spoke soothingly to her.

Presently, as if a thought struck him, he said to her, in a kind voice:

"Dry your tears, exert yourself to recover your composure, and answer me a few questions."

Floret tried to follow his counsel, but with very moderate success.

"Tell me," he said, looking earnestly into her face, did you know anything of the woman whom I saw accost you to-day, and whom you accompanied to the house from which you have just been rescued?"

"Nothing," answered Floret, instantly. "Myself and the young lady who is here with me are strangers in London. We were anxious to find a young woman who was very kind to me in childhood, and whose counsel and protection I deeply need now; but she had quitted her old abode, and the woman who keeps the house refused to furnish us with an apartment in it, because we were unprovided with references. The person to whom you refer accosted us, and offered us an asylum until we could procure a lodging. But when we were in her house we were placed in an apartment, and locked in it. We were there imprisoned while the house was burning, and we should have perished there if the brave fireman had not broken the door in, and rescued us at the moment he did."

"Whom did you see while in the house?" inquired the medical man.

"Only a female servant, who brought us some refreshments, of which we did not partake," returned Floret, quickly.

She sobbed piteously as she concluded, and the doctor was evidently moved by her distress.

He turned to the landlord of the tavern, in whose best private room they were all assembled, and said to him:

"Something must be done, and promptly, for these unfortunate young ladies."

The landlord—a short and rather young man, who had for some time been engaged in curiously examining the features of Floret, promptly replied:

"I think so!"

Then he addressed himself to Floret, and said:

"Do you remember me?"

She raised her eyes to his face, and answered in the negative.

"I think so," she rejoined, emphatically. "Ascot, eh? I think so!" he added, as he saw a change pass over her features at the mention of that place. "Beachborough, eh?" he continued, rapidly; Ascot Heath—a shy with gipsies—a race in a shay-cart—to London in a train—Susan Atten, eh? The Poor Girl, eh? I think so!"

Floret rose to her feet, and sat down; she



turned crimson, and then white again; she trembled excessively, and, in an agitated voice, said:

"Did you see me at Ascot?"

"I think so," he returned.

"And was it you who helped to rescue me from—from the gipsy?" she exclaimed, quickly.

The landlord rubbed his hands, and, with a twinkle of his eyes, replied:

"I think so!"

She clasped her hands together.

"Then," she said, earnestly, "you know Susan Atten?"

"I think so!" returned the landlord, with a chuckle.

"And you will tell me where she is, and will help me to find some home, however humble it may be, in which I and my companion can work, toil, I care not how hard, to obtain a livelihood for us both," she cried, with nervous, eager solicitude.

And the landlord, putting his head slightly on one side, and folding his arms with an expression upon his face which seemed to challenge contradiction from any one in the world, giant though he might be, said emphatically, between his closed teeth:

"I think so!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

"We toil through pain and wrong;

We fight—and fly;

We love; we lose; and then, ere long,

Stone-dead we lie.

O Life! is all thy song

"Endure and—die?"

—BARRY CORNWALL.

Fortunately for Floret and Ida, the landlord of the tavern to which they had been conducted after being rescued from the burning house into which they had been inveigled, was that identical cousin Bob who had so much distinguished himself in assisting to convey her from Ascot Heath and from the clutches of Daddy Windy—Harry Vere's cousin Bob, who had derived infinitely more gratification from that event, and its attendant incidents, than he would have done from seeing a dozen "Emperor's Plates" contested for.

He had parted with his public-house at Windsor to his brother Joe, who had resigned his trade as a butcher, in order that he might become the proprietor of the present house in Pimlico, which promised to be a very profitable speculation.

The doctor having seen Floret and Ida restored to something like composure, and being assured that they would be able, with quiet and a little attention, to recover from their fright, and regain their spirits and strength, prepared to take his leave.

He was delighted to find that his favorable impression of both girls was confirmed to a certain extent by the landlord; and he had no doubt that, innocent and pure, they had been inveigled by the old wretch, whose house had, seemingly been so providentially destroyed, for the worst of purposes. He impressed, with

unnecessary warmth, upon "Cousin Bob" the necessity of treating the young ladies with kind and delicate consideration, and promised to visit them again in the morning, when, if they chose to communicate to him their actual condition, he promised that he would interest himself among his rich patients in their favor.

Floret, with a burning cheek, thanked him for the services he had already rendered to her, and for his benevolent designs, of which, although she said nothing now—she had neither spirit nor heart to converse—she did not intend to avail herself. She shrank from every help which took the form of charity. She was prepared to work, but not to be dependent on the bounty of any being living.

Cousin Bob had a sister who was living with him as his housekeeper.

She had been out that afternoon to visit a friend, and returned home just as the doctor was taking his leave.

A few words placed her in possession of the exciting circumstances which had occurred, and being of as kindly a disposition as her brother Bob, she very quickly busied herself in making Floret and Ida as comfortable and as much at their ease as she could, and gave up to them her own bed-room, without deigning to listen to a word in opposition to her purpose.

Floret and Ida slept soundly that night, for they slept with an unqualified sense of perfect security. The next morning, Floret contrived to have an interview with Bob, and alone.

She found him profoundly engaged in meditating how to bring the very interview which she had thus contrived about, when she appeared before him, and saved him all further trouble.

"I am anxious," she said earnestly, "to have a few minutes' conversation with you alone. Will you oblige me by hearing what I have to say, where we shall not be interrupted?"

"Well, I think so!" responded Bob. "I was just going to propose the same thing to you. No one will interrupt us here. Fire away!"

"Susan Atten—I used to call her Mamma Atten—where is she?" inquired Floret, eagerly.

"Gone to Canada," replied Bob, passing his right hand over his chin, and gazing earnestly in Floret's face.

For a moment he remained silent, and then, with a rapid and rather peculiar emphasis, said:

"You see, Miss—you won't be offended with me, for God knows I don't mean any offence to you, of all His living creatures—but you see, Miss, I want to remind you that ever since you have been a baby you have caused a commotion. You set all Beachborough lying when you first made your appearance there; you was the unhappy cause of as sweet a girl in the world—inno-cent enough of it, the Lord knows—being hurried out of it with something worse than a broken heart, and of



as fine a hearted fellow as was ever born leaving his country and his family, a broken-spirited, blighted man. For love and tenderness for you, poor Susan Atten has had her life cut up—her lover left her for Canada on your account only; and she at last—when you were a second time stolen from her, after fretting herself to a skeleton about you and Harry Vere, finding that it was a hopeless task to endeavor to trace you out—followed Harry out to Canada, in order that she might not break his heart as well as her own, by dying of grief at the loss of somebody else besides him. I saw her before she went away—nay, I'll tell you the truth, Miss—it was through my advice she went out after Harry. I pointed out to her, that if she remained in England she would lose both; but if she went out and secured Harry, she might come back and find you."

Bob paused to wipe the perspiration from off his forehead. It stood in thick beads there. He had not removed his eyes from Floret's face—and he saw from its white rigidity that his words were congealing her blood.

"I know that I'm paining you, Miss," he said, speaking a little huskily, for he evidently was himself affected by the character of the remarks he was making; "but I am paining myself, too; and I have a duty to perform, which I shall perform, as I always have done through my life, when there was a duty to do. It is only right that you should know what others have done and suffered for you, and what a strange fatality seems to cling to you wherever you go and whatever you do. I have seen you but twice. I had a ride for my life the first time; the second you are brought to me, having narrowly escaped losing yours. Having said so much, I have done with that part of the subject. It seems harsh and brutal to speak to you as I have done—at least, if it does not to you, it does to me; but I have thought it right to say what I have, in order that you might not fancy that poor Sussey Atten ran away from England, and from you, without cause. No! She's gone to be united to the man she loves, and who loves her as a true man should love a woman. Before she went she begged me to use my endeavors to find you out if I could; and so I have used them, for this past year; and if there had been another few days to run, I should have laid my finger upon you. I found out your school at Uggiebaraby, too late to catch you. I traced you to the gipsies' camp after you were gone—but here you are, as you say, friendless, homeless, and penniless. Now, Miss, understand from me that you are not friendless, because I have promised Sussey Atten that if I once came up with you, I'd never desert you—and, begging your pardon, Miss, damme if I do—ahem! But, putting me out of the question, there is a great lady I know of who will be your friend, who is almost out of her mind because she has lost you—I mean the lady whose house you were in when you were ill,

and who sent you into the country, from whence the old gipsy stole you away again. She is anxious to receive you again, and support you, if you like to go and live as she wishes you to do. You are not—and you shall not be—homeless, even if you reject her offer; for it will be my care to provide one for you, and you will not be penniless; for Sussey Atten left in my charge a sum of money for you, with the information where to apply for more when that is gone. There, Miss, I have done now. I have said all I had to say. I think so. It has not been a pleasant job; but it is over. There is only one thing more—and that is, that if I can serve you I shall; and that without having anything to say about it—at least, I think not."

Floret heard him to the end without interposing a single word. Not a sound escaped her lips—not a sigh, although her bosom heaved and fell with inward suffering.

Once or twice she essayed to speak; but articulation seemed to be denied her. She pressed the tips of her fingers upon her eyelids—not to drive back tears which might have congregated there, but because her eyeballs ached with an agony which was almost insupportable. Her brain, in fact, was terribly over-taxed.

By a strong effort, however, she spoke. Her voice was hard and hollow; it had none of its old melody in it—its tone made Bob start, and a flush of heat to pass over him.

"There is one figure in the category you have just repeated," she said, slowly, "which you have omitted, and for which even you cannot find an antidote."

"What is that?" he asked, quickly.

"I was friendless, homeless, penniless," she replied, in the same tone, and speaking with forced exertion; "for each of those bitter conditions you have furnished me with a remedy; "but there is yet one grave and important situation which you have not foreseen or imagined—how should you? It is imperative that you—perhaps one other, and only one other—Susan Atten—should know it—it is that I am hopeless!"

She paused for a moment, and Bob started. He would have spoken, but she checked him.

"Hear me out," she said, her voice trembling, although she strove to keep it firm. "I have not much more to say; but little as it is, I pray you to pay heed to it. I ask of you to reflect and comprehend how much is comprised in that one word which I have just uttered. I ask for no friendship, for I have none to give back in return. I cannot, will not see that lady of whom you have spoken, again, nor will I accept her pecuniary assistance, nor that of any other person. It is my earnest wish never to see again any person—and this without exception—whom I have ever seen in my past, miserable life. I need, in the future, only an apartment in an obscure place, with the means of earning enough to pay for what I eat, for what I wear, and for the place in which I may breathe, and lay my head at



night. This is all I require—all I will accept any attempt, proceeding from any source, to compel me to alter the decision at which I have arrived, will be followed by an effectual check to the necessity for any second intervention in my behalf. I know that I bear a fated life; I wish to bear it with patience and fortitude; but in obscurity. I entreat you to understand that. Had I been the child of parents whom I had known and loved; however humble they might have been, it would have been my ambition to have soared—to have grasped at the highest gifts the world has to bestow; as it is, I—I—would to heaven that I were dead—buried—forgotten!”

“Miss Floret!” ejaculated Bob, deprecatingly.

“All my aspirations, yearnings, hopes, are embodied in those last few expressive words,” she continued, passionately, and yet with a plaintively despairing tone, which made Bob move about with a very uneasy and uncomfortable expression. “I implore you,” she continued, with clasped hands, “to believe that I have revealed my wishes to you with undisguised sincerity, without the smallest desire that my future should be other than I have pictured it. I do not—I entreat you to credit me—forget, for a moment, that I innocently, on my own part, have brought upon the few who have tried to serve me, and whom I could have loved tenderly and lastingly, only bitterness and affliction—even death—I have never forgotten it since I became acquainted with the fact—I shall never forget it while I live; but it will be my care that no one, henceforward, shall be made to suffer on my account. You will see, Sir, now, after my explanation, that I require but the humblest sitting and sleeping-room—one, at first, which will serve the purposes of both I should greatly prefer; it will best suit my present condition. I possess many accomplishments which, resolutely and perseveringly applied, will bring me a pittance—a scanty one is all I need. In conclusion, I will ask of you the last favor I trust I shall have to ask of anyone in the world, and I would not even ask it of you, if I thought it might be productive even of inconvenience to you!”

“Ahem!” coughed Bob, trying to clear his voice. “What is it, Miss?”

“Myself and the young lady who is my companion are—excuse me if I repeat, from no faults of our own—are without relatives, or even acquaintances,” she continued. “We have already found it difficult to obtain a furnished apartment, being unable to give a reference to any person who can vouch that we are simply honest. May I ask you, Sir, to interest yourself to procure for us such an apartment as I have suggested, and, further, to oblige me with your advice and knowledge, so as to enable us instantly to commence to earn the bread which we must eat to live the term which He has ordained for us to bear our Cross on earth.”

She paused. Her voice faltered a little, at

the last; but she had maintained it clear and moderately firm throughout, although the tone was low, and once or twice it shivered, as it were, with her deep emotion.

Bob coughed three or four times before he attempted a reply, and then he said, with a great outburst:

“You must excuse me, Miss, if I don’t speak very clearly, for I’ve a lump in my throat just now as big as an egg—ahem! But—but—Lord, Lord! I cannot bear to hear you speak in the way you do, Miss. I tell you I can’t bear it—ahem! ahem! I am rough and thoughtless in my way, and I know very well that I don’t always express myself as I wish to do; but I can see, I can form conclusions, and I can feel—ahem! I say I can feel. I have behaved like a brute, for I’ve said what I ought not to have said; but, Lord, I was so anxious that you should think kindly of Susan Atten, that, in my anxiety, I said just what was likely to make you think the reverse.”

“Nothing you could have said, or might say, would have the effect of changing my feelings of loving affection and tenderness for her,” interposed Floret.

“But it has had a blistering effect on you,” he rejoined, and added quickly, as she made a gesture of dissent, “Don’t interrupt me just at the present moment, please Miss, or I shall lose what is uppermost in my mind. I tell you I know something of your history—enough to make me know how to shape my course with respect to you. I knew pretty Fanny Shelley; I knew Stephen Vere, as I knew his brother Harry—nay, they are cousins of mine; and I know Susan Atten. I love them all as I love my heart’s best blood, and I know how deep the interest of three of them, at least, was settled in your fate. Don’t you think that is enough for me? Don’t you think that is enough to make me interest myself in your behalf, without your troubling yourself to put to me as a favor that which I shall do as a duty. I think so! Now let me tell you, as a friend, that your thoughts and feelings are in a very unnatural condition, and they want a doctor to make them well—not a medical doctor—because it’s my belief that he would very soon end the whole matter with a coffin and spade; but that doctor whose medicine is a clean, lively place to live in, kind friends about you, plenty to do, and independence of action. That you shall have. It is unnatural, I say, to hear you talk. Yours is not the language of despondency, of dejection, of foreboding, but of absolute, hopeless despair.”

“It is!” she exclaimed, “it must—it will ever be while I live.”

“Damme if it shall!” cried Bob, violently; and added, with some confusion, “I beg your pardon, Miss, I couldn’t help it—those expressions of excitement, I think they call them, will slip out now and then, in spite of our teeth, won’t they, Miss? I think so. However, that isn’t just what I was going to say. I know that your mind is uneasy about your



future quarters; let it rest quite easy on that point, and quite easy, too, on another—I mean about getting something to do. I can settle both points for you to-day.”

“I shall be deeply grateful,” exclaimed Floret, quickly and anxiously.

“Yes, within ten minutes from this time,” continued Bob, “or I may be too late, and that won’t do; at least, I think not. You see, Miss, I have an aunt who lived for a good many years down in Nottinghamshire, with the old Marquis of Broadlands. She has left service with a little she has saved, and she has taken a house not far from here, at the back of Eaton Square, where she lets apartments. All the best of the upper part is in the occupation of two elderly maiden ladies, and the lower part she has for herself. But she has just finished furnishing two top rooms, very quietly and very moderately, which she means to let to—there, just two such parties as the young lady up-stairs and yourself. I’ll do the introduction part, and that will be all that is necessary for that part of the business. And then for the other part of it, my aunt was speaking to me about wanting a young lady, well educated, to take charge of a little orphan girl, whose father is an officer in India, and whose mother, who has not returned long to England in ill health, has recently died. Now you have been at a good school, I know, and you can take charge of this little girl, can’t you, Miss?”

Floret bent her head. She felt that she was unable to trust herself to speak.

“And,” continued Bob, “we shall soon find something for the young lady up-stairs to do, very soon. Therefore you may, if you please, Miss, wipe off a little piece of the cloud on your brow, and I shall soon give you cause to wipe off another piece, for I expect that Susan and her husband, Harry Vere, will be back again before very long. The old man down home has won his lawsuits. Ay! the whole of them, and he has now three farms, nearly two thousand acres in all, to call his own. One he keeps for himself, one he has settled on Stephen, and the other on Harry, who are to pay something toward making a fund for the rest of the family. He has written to Canada for both of them to come home immediately, and you may be sure they will. There, won’t that bring back sunshine to your pretty face, Miss?” She bent her head, and murmured:

“No!”

“Ah!” responded Bob, looking solicitously at her, “I think I know what you have on your mind; but I won’t trust myself to say anything, for perhaps I should make a fool of myself if I do. But this I will tell you: I have seen the sky dark, the clouds low, rain falling, and no visible sign that there will be any change for a long, long time; and while this gloom has been hanging over me, dense and thick, I’ve seen a little spider pop out from a gooseberry-branch, swing itself to another, and begin briskly to spin its web. Then I knew that the clouds were going to clear off,

and the brightest and clearest sunshine would shortly and certainly follow. All round you, Miss, has been gloom and darkness—storm and frost. But I can see, though you can’t, that there is a web weaving in your case, and that the clouds which hang threateningly over you will soon be driven away. You shake your head. You forget two things; one, that you are very young: it is only morning with you—there is plenty of time for sunshine before your day can run out. The other, that it is profitless work to mourn over circumstances, unless you know that they are absolute facts!”

Floret started, and gazed inquiringly at him. He put his head on one side, and, with a smile on his lip and a twinkle in his eye, responded:

“Eh? I think so!”

Then he added, in a cheerful tone:

“I’m off to aunt, now. I shall be back in a few minutes, and you can go, Miss, in the meanwhile, and make your friend’s mind happy.”

He was back in a few minutes. In the interval, Floret had explained to Ida what arrangements Bob had proposed to make for them, and she listened to her with delight. On Bob’s return, he told them that he had explained all that was necessary to his aunt, and that she would be glad to receive them as soon as they pleased to proceed to her house.

He offered to escort them thither, and they gladly accepted his kindness. They parted with the utterance of earnest thanks to Bob’s sister, who had, during their short stay, behaved to them with the kindest and most thoughtful attention; and they were very soon at the door of their new home.

Bob’s aunt answered the door, and both Floret and Ida saw, in an instant, that they should like her—she looked so kindly, so smiling, and good-tempered.

“My aunt, Mrs. Spencer,” said Bob, with a roguish nod of the head; “one of the best sorts out. The young ladies, Mrs. Spencer; two of the best sorts this side of Elysium—that is, I think so!”

A glance at both satisfied a woman as experienced as Mrs. Spencer. She saw instantly, by their refined and delicate appearance, and their lady-like manners, that they were, if poor, exceedingly well bred. She welcomed them in a pleasant way, and at once introduced them to their apartments.

Floret gazed around her on entering them with something like dismay. They—though, as Bob had said, very moderately furnished—were beyond what she hoped or intended to engage. But, before she could offer a remark, a thin, delicate child, evidently born in India, with a sallow complexion, large, deep-brown, thoughtful eyes, and long, dark hair, which streamed loosely down to her shoulders, was brought to her notice by Bob.

“The motherless child,” he said, with a shrewd glance at Floret, “and her new mamma’s little beauty. You will be a mamma to her, for a time, won’t you, Miss?”



The child looked up at her, sorrowfully and wistfully.

Floret caught her in her arms, bowed her face upon her neck, and sobbed passionately.

There was a silence for a minute, and then Floret drew herself up, and, with an impatient gesture, brushed the tears from her eyelids.

She turned to Mrs. Spencer, and said:

"You will pardon my emotion. I am in weak health, and there are memories which sometimes get the better of my self-command."

"I quite appreciate your tenderness, Miss," responded Mrs. Spencer; "and I am glad that I have witnessed it, for I am sure that you will be kind to this poor little motherless child. Terms will not be so much a question, for there is plenty of money in the family, but kindness and tenderness will be everything."

"She shall not feel the need of them while in my charge," murmured Floret.

"Then all is right for the present," observed Bob. "Eh, aunt? I think so!"

"All right, Bob," returned his aunt, with a smile.

"Then," said he, "I shall return to my drum with as light a heart in my body as ever I had in my life. Good-bye, young ladies; I shall drop in, now and then, to see how you are getting on. Eh, aunt? I think so!"

Bob waved his hand, and scampered off, before they could offer him one word of grateful acknowledgment for his kindness to them.

"A kind, good-hearted boy is Bob," observed Mrs. Spencer, smiling.

Floret was about to reply, when her eye was attracted by an oil portrait hanging in the room.

It was that of a youth of fourteen; he had fair hair, parted at the side, rich blue eyes, a handsome face, and a most amiable expression of countenance.

Mrs. Spencer saw that Floret's eyes settled on the face, and she said, instantly:

"Ah, the dear boy! isn't he a sweet fellow? Ah! I've known him since he was first laid in his cot. The kindest-hearted, the most generous-spirited, sweetest-tempered little fellow—he's a tall fellow now, though—you could ever meet with, Miss! Dear me! I could tell you many hundred anecdotes about him. He was very partial to me, and I quite doted on him, the dear fellow!"

"What is his name?" inquired Ida.

"Victor," replied Mrs. Spencer.

"Victor—Victor—it is a very pretty name," said Ida, reflectively. "Where have I heard it?"

"Ah!" rejoined Mrs. Spencer, "it is a name I often mention in my prayers. He is Lord Victor Trentham, the second son of the Marquis of Broadlands, with whom I lived, at Trentham, in Nottinghamshire."

Floret sank upon a seat.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"And, O that pang where more than madness lies!  
The worm that will not sleep—and never dies;  
Thought of the gloomy day and ghastly night,  
Yet dreads the darkness, and yet loathes the light.  
That winds around and tears the quivering heart!  
Ah! wherefore not consume it—and depart?"  
—BYRON.

"Lord Victor Trentham, second son of the Marquis of Broadlands, of Trentham Park, Nottinghamshire!" How those words went to the heart of poor Floret, and forced her into a seat, as though each sound were a weapon used to strike her down!

The sight of the portrait of the young lord startled her, when her eyes roving round the walls of the apartment first fell upon it. At the first glance she had an impression that the face strikingly resembled one which was far dearer to her than she would trust herself to acknowledge, even when completely alone with her thoughts; but when Mrs. Spencer somewhat abruptly mentioned the name of the original, such a throng of thoughts rushed through her brain that she became powerless, and sunk down upon a chair, for the moment quite overcome.

In the delicate condition of frame to which bad living, great anxiety of mind, and considerable fatigue, recently endured, had reduced her, she was an easy prey to emotion, especially the peculiar emotion which was created by the observation of Mrs. Spencer. Had she been in better health she would not have suffered the words to pass by without betraying any sign that the mention of Lord Victor's name could affect her; but being feeble, and her nerves being wholly unstrung, she no longer possessed that amount of self-control which would enable her to conceal an inward agony with an outward appearance of immovable calmness.

Yes, it is useless to disguise it. The face, form, name of Lord Victor were inexpressibly dear to her. It is the nature of woman to love something, and she evinces that disposition at the earliest age, when her powers of affection are drawn first into existence by a doll. Floret was not in this respect unlike her sex. She had a full share of love in her composition, but circumstances had compelled it to remain latent. Its powers were none the less intent on that account; she wanted but the object to lavish upon it a treasure of affection and tenderness which could not be surpassed.

The face of Lord Victor, beautiful in itself—and what is more attractive than the bright, handsome countenance of a high-bred boy?—beamed first upon her as that of an angel suddenly appearing to save her from the rough and brutish usage of a boor. She saw it afterward only on occasions when it was shining on her pleasantly, and its owner was striving to save her—she a poor, nameless outcast. It had lived in her memory from the first moment she beheld it, as a star by her unapproachable, but not the less to be worshipped.



Since her interview with Hagar, when hope, with the icy hand of a fiend, had been wrenched out of her heart, she had inwardly and firmly resolved that henceforward Lord Victor should be only a memory to her. There were times, perhaps, when in solitude, unbroken even by a sound, she had indulged in delicious dreams of a paradise into which no care could enter, and in which they could wander together, loving and loved, without an alloy to their happiness. She had dispersed those dreams now. She had, perhaps, set him up in her heart as an idol to be secretly worshiped; but that was all. So when she suddenly and unexpectedly learned that Mrs. Spencer had known him from his infancy, and was respected by him, it became instantly a logical conclusion in her mind, that when he had the opportunity he would call upon Mrs. Spencer to satisfy himself about her health and prospects, and that if in the future he were to do so, he would occasionally be in the same house with her, would probably see her, or hear of her, and would then make an attempt to speak to her.

With this conviction pressing on her brain—pleasant as the sight of his handsome face would be in her eyes, sweetly as the soft tones of his voice would fall upon her ear, dear indeed as his presence would be, under any circumstances, save in her own unhappy situation, to her—she felt it to be a duty to avoid him—nay, a necessity—for in his presence she felt that she should cower to the earth in shame and abject humiliation.

When Mrs. Spencer had concluded speaking, Floret turned her eyes upon the portrait, perhaps with the idea of looking her last upon it, and she said, faintly:

"Does Lord Victor Trentham often visit you here?"

Mrs. Spencer uttered a little scream.

"Lord bless the child!" she exclaimed; "no—oh, no! His lordship has not left college yet; and in his vacation he is too much occupied to think about me, though he does write to me, and send at times to kindly inquire about me. No, my dear young lady, the old Marquis and Marchioness have honored me by calling twice upon me when they have come to town, just to ask after my health and see how I am getting on; but young Lord Victor has not been to this house, and I dare say never will come. No, Miss, when I want to see him—and I can tell you that is not seldom, I go up to the town-house, or manage a few days down at Trentham Park. No, no, I don't expect to see him here."

Floret heaved a sigh of relief, and took off her bonnet and mantle. Ida instantly followed her example, clapped her hands with glee, went down upon her knees before the child, began to tickle and play with it; and Mrs. Spencer, with a bustling, smiling face, hurried off to prepare something unusually tempting, nice, and nourishing for dinner.

Six months passed away, and spring, after

an unusually severe winter, had arrived. A rich, beautiful, blue-skied, warm spring; the leaves and blossoms, the fruits, and the flowers were all bursting into glorious and luxuriant life. It found Floret and Ida still with Mrs. Spencer; and it found them greatly changed in appearance, and in their condition of mind—that is to say, Floret's despair had not been weakened, diminished, or invaded even by the shadow of a hope, but she was perfectly calm and resigned to her fate. She expected no better condition than that she was now enjoying; and as all ambition was now dead within her, she wished for no other. She was contented, and even outwardly cheerful, for she did not obtrude upon Ida the one bitter, cankering sorrow ever gnawing at her own heart, whose corrosion, if not arrested, would eat up her young life, and that at no very distant period; and she exerted herself many times, when it was an exertion, to make Ida lively and happy, if she saw that some inward thoughts traced a pensive cloud upon her brow.

In spite of her settled sadness, there was a great improvement in her outward appearance. The absence of society, the regularity of living, the sufficiency of good and nourishing diet, could not fail to tell favorably upon her frame, and she appeared now more lovely than she had ever done before in her life. She was tall, her figure was both commanding and graceful, and she moved with the ease and dignity not only of one born in a high sphere, but of one who was also bred to an elevated station. Mild, even meek, in her words, she yet awed Mrs. Spencer; but it was the awe which was reverential, not that which is created by hauteur. That good lady could not help cogitating much about her. She had no doubt, whatever might be the circumstances which had placed her in so humble a condition, that she was by birth connected with some very high family, and she treated her accordingly.

Mrs. Spencer had succeeded, through some influence she possessed, in obtaining for both Floret and Ida fancy work of the rarer kinds to do, from an establishment in Regent street, and she kindly acted as their agent. She went for orders, and took them home when executed, handing over to Floret, who was the treasurer and manager for both, the proceeds. This work, added to the salary which Floret had for attending to and instructing the little orphan child, enabled both her and Ida to provide themselves with a small wardrobe each, and to appear in a manner more agreeable to their wishes, and very different to that to which they had been accustomed. Dress, when well chosen, and worn with becoming taste, is an aid to the beauty of even the most beautiful. Both Floret and Ida were exceedingly good-looking, but when dressed in their new attire, fashioned and trimmed as it was according to the latest mode, they were sufficiently elegant in their appearance to have commanded the admiration of those from whom praise would be praise indeed.



That short six months had done much for them, and Mrs. Spencer was delighted to see how much. Her nephew, Bob, true to his promise, called now and then to see "how they were getting on", as he said; and when he had seen, he never failed to give a joyous twinkle of the eye, a screwing smile of the lip, to hold his head slightly and roguishly on one side, and to ejaculate: "I think so." He sent them in many little luxuries, which they enjoyed, without knowing that he was the donor; and, even in their wardrobe, they could not have become possessed of half the stock they had acquired, if he had not contrived that they should obtain them at very much less than the cost price.

No tidings had been received of Susan Attenby Bob since Floret's arrival in Pimlico, and he, by that silence, concluded that the Veres and Susan were on their way home. Floret was not grieved at this silence. In fact, it would be almost just to say that she was rejoiced, for she had a distressing fear that, if Susan did come home, and they were to be rejoined, that such a reunion would only bring disaster to Susan, and a new unhappiness to herself.

As she was now situated, she was peaceful and resigned; she did not wish to disturb her position; and though when alone she frequently examined the card which Nat Ferret had given to her, and thought with no common earnestness over his innuendoes, she decided not to communicate with him. She could not see how her condition was to be improved by aught that he could accomplish; she had no desire to make it worse, and she certainly had no wish to bring upon herself disgrace and humiliation by publishing to the world the infamy of her birth, even though she might compel a greater amount of justice to be rendered to her than had been meted out to her.

She thought it strange that Liper Leper had never made his appearance, nor had sent any communication to her; but she argued from this that there was no danger approaching her; and she felt, consequently, that it was certainly advisable, for her own sake, to make no movement which should disturb her present peaceful state.

Having got over her fear of a visit from Lord Victor to Mrs. Spencer, it was the source of deep but silent gratification to her when the old lady came up and sat with them to have "a bit of chat", as she said, but in reality to do any little odd job in mending or making they might require, to draw her into a conversation about him. If the old dame happened to be in a garrulous vein, she went into numberless particulars about his boyhood, which, but for her good-humor, would never have been narrated.

"He was such a curious boy," observed the old woman one day, reflectively; "he would set his heart upon things no one but he would ever dream of caring a pin for. Dear, dear—what an awful passion he flew into one day with me!"

"With you!" remarked Ida, with a quiet

smile. "I should never have thought that he could have been out of temper with you—such a dear, kind, good creature as you are."

Mrs. Spencer smiled.

"Ay, but he could, though," she rejoined, "and all through a bunch of rubbishy wild flowers."

"Wild flowers!" ejaculated Floret, softly, looking up from her work.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Spencer, "a nosegay of wild flowers, which some poor, little, bare-legged, ragged girl gave to him in Trentham Wood one day—ah!—it's a good many years ago, and yet it seems but yesterday."

Floret felt her heart beat rapidly.

"Why should he be angry with you, Mrs. Spencer, on account of the flowers?" she asked, in an undertone, looking down steadfastly upon her work again.

"Well, my dear young Miss, to tell you the truth," replied Mrs. Spencer, smilingly, "I believe this ragged child, a mere chit, had a very pretty face; and, boy as he was, he liked a girl with a pretty face better than one with an ugly one—the rogue. Ah, me! It's the sex, Miss; they're all alike—"

"But the—the flowers," suggested Floret, a little anxiously.

"Well, Miss, I cannot tell you all the circumstances, how he came by the flowers, and so on," pursued Mrs. Spencer; "I only know that one day, while setting his little favorite room to rights—his study, Miss—I noticed that a quantity of the commoner wild flowers that grow by the hedgeside had been formed into a bouquet, and put carefully into a white vase, with some water to preserve them as long as they would blow. There they remained, day after day, until they began to die off; so I went to the gardener, and made him gather me a very pretty bouquet of the choicest flowers in blossom, and I put it into the vase, instead of the wild flowers."

"What did you—what became of the wild flowers?" inquired Floret, in a voice that was scarcely audible.

"Oh, I threw them away," returned Mrs. Spencer, promptly.

How at that moment Floret in her heart hated Mrs. Spencer.

"There was all the mischief," continued Mrs. Spencer. "Lord Victor happened to come into the room shortly afterward, and I pointed out to him that I had been putting his room in order. With his usual courtesy and good breeding, he thanked me, and praised me for my attention, and for the orderly arrangement of the books and papers, which had previously been scattered about the apartment in the wildest confusion. In the fullness of my heart, I drew his attention to the beautiful bouquet, with which I had replaced the dying, worthless wild flowers, and then he stared at me, and absolutely turned as white as a ghost; just as if I had abruptly told him that something dreadful had happened. 'Mrs. Spencer,' he said, in a quiet voice, but I heard it shake, though, 'Mrs. Spencer, where have



you placed the wild flowers that were in the vase?" "I have thrown them away, my Lord," I answered, rather meekly, for I began to fancy I had done wrong; when, dear me! dear me! he flew into the most awful passion for a young gentleman that you can imagine—O! you couldn't imagine it. He threw the vase, and the flowers I had obtained from the gardener for him, out of the window; he raved and stamped about the room in a perfect frenzy; and what do you think he continued saying?"

Floret was silent; her heart beat so violently that the power of articulation was denied altogether.

"Why," proceeded Mrs. Spencer, without waiting for her reply, "he kept saying that they were the unsolicited gift of a poor girl, and that he prized them more dearly on that account than if they had been given to him by an empress."

"What a darling!" ejaculated Ida, in the most impressive manner.

"I never before, nor have I ever since, seen him in such a frenzy," resumed Mrs. Spencer: "I did not know how to pacify him; and I begged him to tell me what I could do to repair the mischief I had done. He seemed convulsed with passion; but at length, looking at me furiously, he said that I could do nothing but restore the flowers, which I had so thoughtlessly, so heedlessly, so wickedly flung away. Fortunately, I remembered where I had tossed them, and trembling all over, and quite in a profuse perspiration, I hurried to the spot, and sure enough, to my own great delight, there they were, lying just as I had thrown them. I whipped them up, and hurried back with them to him. When I showed them to him, he absolutely snatched them from me, and then bade me leave him to himself. I was glad enough to get away from him that morning I assure you."

"But what did he do with the flowers?" inquired Ida, with evident interest, while Floret, with face, neck, bosom, suffused with the crimson, remained quite silent.

"O," returned Mrs. Spencer, shrugging her shoulders, "I happened to take a message to him from the Marquis about an hour afterward, and there he was, busily engaged with some pieces of blotting-paper, and I do not know what else beside, drying and fussing with those stupid flowers, laying them carefully upon the sheets of paper, separating the leaves and blossoms with such patience and perseverance, it was quite wonderful to behold. 'There,' Mrs. Spencer, he said, with glee, when he perceived me observing him with surprise, 'there, you see, I take more care of a gift than you do.' Of course, I couldn't say anything, and I did not; I only thought what a strange boy he was. My life for it, he has those very flowers carefully put away in some secret place now. Dear, dear, the fuss there was about those poor wild flowers."

Floret bent her head lower and lower over her work, as Mrs. Spencer drew toward a conclusion, to conceal the thickly-falling tears,

which, in spite of her efforts to conceal them, would force their way from her eyelids. A sigh, of such deep, such acute agony, and so prolonged, escaped from her lips that it reached Ida's ears.

She turned her eyes instantly upon Floret, and perceived her emotion. The truth at once flashed through her brain. She remembered now where she had heard the name of Lord Victor. She remembered now that she had seen him, too.

It was not difficult to guess that Floret, having met him under some circumstances with which she was unacquainted, had fallen in love with him, and that at a time when the eyes see through the heart—when the judgment, trammelled by love, perceives no distinction of position, and thinks nothing impossible that it wishes to happen. It was not difficult to guess that her judgment, having become clearer, pointed out to her that her love was hopeless, and that she had surrendered her heart to a chimera.

Ida understood all, and respected as she sympathized with Floret's silent grief; she hoped that it might not be her own case. She mentally thanked Heaven that she had not fallen in love with Hyde Vaughan, who was Lord Victor's companion, because, if she had, there could be no doubt that her own plight would be as pitiable as that of Floret.

Not that Hyde Vaughan was, in her opinion, less handsome, less attractive, less lovable at first sight than Lord Victor; indeed, if there were to arise a situation in which it would be necessary for her to betray a preference, she rather fancied that Hyde Vaughan would stand the best chance of winning it from her; but, withal, she was not in love with him. No; she had not seen enough of him for that. No; her heart was quite her own as yet, and Hyde Vaughan might, for her, marry whomsoever he pleased. She felt, it is true, that she should deliberately, and without qualification, hate his wife, though that would, she knew, be very wrong; but that was by way of episode, and as she should probably never see her, and certainly never knew her, she fancied that, wrong as it was, there could not be much harm in it. Just to show, in fact, that she could speak of him with ease, and would not be in any degree affected by the mention of his name, or the relation of any circumstances with which he was affected, she said to Mrs. Spencer:

"Did you ever hear that Lord Victor had a friend—a dear male friend—to whom he was very strongly attached?"

"Yes," returned Mrs. Spencer, with surprise. "Why, my dear?"

"O, nothing—nothing," she returned, suddenly, blushing, and exhibiting her coolness and self-possession by a half-frightened look. "I only thought that a young gentleman—a young nobleman—a—who was—so fond of a young—of a poor—a bunch of wild flowers—a—must be—must be passionately fond of a friend. That was all," she returned, with much



confusion. She was, in fact, herself surprised that her unconcern was not so available as she thought it would have proved.

"Well, Lord Victor certainly did have, and he now has, a most intimate companion and friend, of whom he was much fonder than of his own brother, and that was the Honorable Hyde Vaughan," returned Mrs. Spencer, calmly. "I expect him here to-morrow morning, at eleven; he is to bring me a message from the Marquis of Broadlands, who does not forget me when he has an opportunity of sending to me. Would you like to see him?—he is such a nice, handsome young gentleman."

"Not for the world?" exclaimed Floret and Ida, with one breath.

Mrs. Spencer looked at them with surprise, and then she laughed.

"Ah!" she said, shaking her head, "you will neither of you always be so desirous of shunning the sight of a gentleman! Mr. Right will present himself at the right time, and you'll both of you find yourselves married almost before you have any idea of changing your condition."

The next morning, Floret confined herself to her chamber. Ida did the same; but jumped and startled every time there was a knock at the street-door, or a ring at the bell. As the clock was striking eleven, Mrs. Spencer came into the sitting-room, and told Ida that there was a person below who wished to see her. Her cheek blanched, and her young heart palpitated furiously. She inquired of Mrs. Spencer, with a face as white as death, who it could be who wanted to see her.

"A young woman from Regent street, about some fresh work for you; she wishes to give the instructions only to yourself," returned Mrs. Spencer.

Ida flew down stairs like a bird. Mrs. Spencer followed her, at a slow pace.

In the hall, Ida ran into the arms of a gentleman, who, at the moment, had opened the door and entered.

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed; and, as he caught a glimpse of Ida's face, he ejaculated: "Good Heaven!"

It was Hyde Vaughan.

A faint scream burst from Ida's lips. She was about to fly up the stairs again, but he caught her by the wrist.

"One word, I entreat of you," he said, hastily. "Do you live here?"

"Yes," she replied, faintly.

"I must see you again," he said rapidly.

"I must speak with you alone—say—think, how it can be managed."

"It is impossible!" she murmured, and tried to disengage herself from his grasp.

"It is imperative, and not impossible," he urged. "Be quick; some one comes. Where can I see you? You have no idea of the importance of what I ask."

She flung off his hand, and, with a dignity which startled him, said:

"I have told you, Sir, that I live here. If

you have anything important to say to me address me through Mrs. Spencer."

"You do not understand me!" he said, hurriedly.

"Nor do you understand me," she returned, with flushed cheeks and brow.

At this moment Mrs. Spencer made her appearance; the Honorable Hyde Vaughan immediately addressed her, and she conducted him, with much stately ceremony, into her sitting-room. Simultaneously the young woman from the house in Regent street—who had, unobserved, been standing in a dark corner of the hall—emerged from her obscurity, and placed a parcel in Ida's hands. With it she entered into a series of particulars of which Ida had only the haziest notion. She heard her to the end, however, with apparent patience and attention, although she trembled so that the young woman noticed it, and bade her recover herself, and think nothing of it—for that gentlemen were very impudent, and were always ready to insult a poor girl when they had the chance.

As soon as the girl had completed the directions she was instructed to give, she departed, and Ida flew up the stairs, and entering the sitting-room, looked round for Floret. She was not there—the little Indian girl was seated at the table, busy at her books; but she was alone.

Ida laid down her parcel of fancy-work, and ran into the bed-room; Floret was seated on the bed, and in tears.

Ida, in her excitement, did not notice this. She flung her trembling arms round Floret's neck, and said, in a voice which quivered in every tone:

"O darling, I've seen him—I've seen him!"

With a face paler than marble, Floret rejoined:

"Whom? Lord Victor!"

"No—no," whispered Ida; "his dear friend and companion, Mr. Hyde Vaughan."

Floret became as cold as ice. It was much the same as if she had seen Lord Victor.

She knew that her present home could be her pleasant home no longer.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

"And there with glassy gaze she stood,  
As ice were in her curdled blood;  
But every now and then a tear,  
So large and slowly gather'd, slid  
From the long dark fringe of that fair lid—  
It was a thing to see, not hear!  
And those who saw, it did surprise,  
Such drops could fall from human eyes.  
To speak the thought—the imperfect note  
Was choked within her swelling throat,  
Yet seem'd in that low, hollow groan,  
Her whole heart gushing in the tone."

—BYRON.

It was some little time before Floret recovered from her agitation sufficiently to ask, and Ida had obtained a mastery over her excitement to explain, what transpired at the interview between the latter and the Honorable Hyde Vaughan in the hall.

When, with parched white lips, Ida had related all that she had to communicate, Floret



thought that it amounted to nothing; Ida, to a very great deal. Floret imagined, as it was perfectly natural for her to do, that Hyde Vaughan would have put fifty questions to Ida about her. Ida had no idea that Hyde Vaughan had any thoughts in his head about any other than herself.

As she thought over what had happened, she fancied that she had behaved harshly, coldly, cruelly to him. Why should her spirit have rebelled at his request? why should she instinctively have felt wounded by his proposition to her to meet him alone? What was there wrong in it? he might have something to say to her which he wished no one to hear but herself. And what could he have to say to her that could possibly offend her?

His hand was so silken and soft, his eyes so earnest and pleading, his voice so tender and persuasive. She was vexed with herself for having been so cross to him. It was very likely that she should never see him again, and she had only herself to blame for it.

She thought that he looked so sorrowful when she tore herself away from him, and she promised herself that if another opportunity for a meeting occurred, she would not be so cold or so grand to him.

Poor girl! she did not understand in what direction those feelings in his favor tended, or if nourished, how fatal they might prove to herself.

Floret, after a short silence, intimated to her that it would be imperative upon them to quit Mrs. Spencer's house and seek another home; but Ida, though she said nothing, was unable to see the necessity for any such removal.

She was, however, prepared to follow wherever Floret led; but it would have been a dangerous situation for her if, at the moment she was meditating on Floret's intimation, Hyde Vaughan had stood at her elbow, and presented to her the alternative of his society, a pleasant home, and no probability of future want.

The two girls, after their communion, awaited with some impatience and some dread the coming of Mrs. Spencer, and though she did come at her usual time to attend upon them, it seemed long after it. They did not turn their eyes up to her, they listened for a change in her tone, and a communication of which they could form no idea, save that it would not be favorable to them.

To their surprise, there was no change in the old lady's voice or in her conduct. She was as cheerful and as chatty as usual, and went through the routine of her duties as exactly as she had always done.

And she made no communication to them arising out of the visit of the Honorable Hyde Vaughan.

She did not even mention his name.

And a whole week passed away without her saying anything about him, to the surprise of Floret and the amazing disappointment of Ida.

This conduct appeared so singular to Ida

after what he had said to her. He declared that he had something very important to communicate to her; and if he had, she thought, why had he not accepted her proposition and addressed her through Mrs. Spencer?

She wished now that she had stopped and listened to what he had to say. Floret had praised her warmly for the manner in which she had acted upon the occasion of meeting him—she was not so sure herself that she had done wisely.

And she fretted and fretted, and formed vain wishes, and in this, at least, acted very unwisely.

And as the time wore on, the work respecting which she had received instructions was completed, and it was sent home. A message was, however, returned to her to say that the instructions given had not been followed; but, as the work was very beautifully executed, it would be retained, and materials for a fresh piece, to be executed according to the original instructions, would be given out; but, in order to prevent any further mistakes, the young lady who had done the work was requested to receive the instructions personally from the principal of the establishment in Regent street.

After some consultation, it was arranged that Ida should accompany the young woman who brought the message back to Regent street, and that Mrs. Spencer, who was then busy, should, when at liberty, go and meet her, and accompany her.

A route was laid down, so that it would be impossible to miss each other, and the arrangement was carried out.

Floret was left alone with the little Indian girl.

The afternoon was warm and sunny, and the child, overcome by the heat, fell into a deep slumber. Floret conveyed her to her bed, and laying her gently upon it, watched her a few moments. Observing that she slept tranquilly, she returned to her sitting-room, and occupied herself with some needlework while she indulged in a fit of abstraction.

In deep and profound thought she remained for some little time, and at length she heaved a profound sigh, and murmured:

"He did not despise my poor flowers, how can I help honoring him, if only for that. He was so respectful and gentle, too, and—"

She paused, her eyelids became distended, her lips parted, and an expression of intense amazement passed over her features.

In the doorway, regarding her with earnest attention and unequivocal admiration, stood a young and elegant man.

She sprang to her feet, for she saw that it was Lord Victor Trentham who stood before her.

A faint scream escaped her lips, and her impulse was to fly—but whither? Then, too, there came to her instantly the impression that such an act would be childish, and opposed to certain dignified feelings which were inherent in her, and which mostly determined her ac-



tion, when impulses and instincts would have induced her to take some course of which they did not approve.

She stood still, and unable to bear the soft yet intense gaze of his lustrous liquid eyes, she bent her head toward the ground.

"I have to apologize to you for an apparent intrusion," commenced Lord Victor, in a soft and gentle tone. "I assure you that my appearance here is not intended as such, and before I leave, I hope that you will acknowledge that it has not been one. I have been seeking for Mrs. Spencer all over the house; I was informed that I should find her in this room. I gave a gentle summons at the door here. I presume that you did not hear me, for I have stood in your presence almost a minute before you have discovered me. Let me explain why I did this. I am here, I at once admit, for the purpose of seeing you; but, when my eyes first fell upon your face, I was not quite certain that I had entered the right apartment, or that I was about to address the lady of whom I came hither in search. A second glance reassured me, however, that I was gazing upon a face which was indelibly fixed upon my memory when I was a boy, and which, I am quite sure, will never fade from it while I live."

Floret was very pale, and breathed with difficulty; but, though the task was a difficult one, she forced herself to say:

"Cruelty, my Lord, I do not believe to be a fault of yours. I have been given to understand that you would not wantonly injure a worm. I beg of you to spare me the pain of compliments. You have ventured bravely in my behalf, do not wound me now that I am helpless."

"It was not with a view of complimenting you that I referred to a fact," he answered. "The circumstances attending the few meetings which have taken place between us have been so exceptional that, without attempting to pay a mere compliment, I am justified in asserting that it is improbable I shall ever forget your face, or the circumstances under which we have met."

"I give you credit for truth," said Floret, in the same undertone, which quivered at every word. "That, I have learned, is one of your virtues—let me hope that among the many noble qualities attributed to you, you possess compassion."

"Compassion!" he ejaculated, with surprise.

"Yes, my Lord, I repeat—compassion," she rejoined with emotion, which she found it impossible to conceal. "You know something of my history—enough to make it appear strange to you—painful, O Heaven! inconceivably painful to me. There are—are some persons, my Lord, whose opinions of us we treat with unconcern—there—are others—whose good opinion we should deem cheaply purchased by the sacrifice of a life—whose—acorn—whose disdain—whose contempt would be worse—worse than any death—any torture

—any horrors of agony which human malignity or ferocity could devise."

She turned her head away.

"How can this apply to me?" he said, quickly and anxiously. She remained silent.

"I should feel keenly wounded, I confess," he continued, with a solicitous expression, "if I were to imagine that you held my opinion of you with unconcern; but you inflict upon yourself most unnecessary pain, if you conceive for an instant that at any time the opinion I do hold of you could degenerate into a sentiment which, while it could never be derogatory to you, would be most unworthy to me."

"You do not know, my Lord, what feeling a knowledge of my unhappy history might generate in your breast," she said, hurriedly, and added, in a beseeching tone, "I entreat you, therefore, to spare me the misery of listening to any proposition you may be here with the purpose of making to me, and which I know, before I hear it, I must reject; and I pray of you to conclude an interview at the earliest moment, which—whatever may be its influence upon you—inflicts upon me the most acute anguish."

"I will not discuss the point with you," replied Lord Victor, in a tender and soothing—rather than a compassionate—tone; "that I feel would be a proceeding calculated, indeed, to inflict unnecessary pain upon you and upon me—for it is no idle observation thoughtlessly made which urges me to say, that to see you suffer would make me suffer too."

Again she turned her head from him, and he could see, by the heaving of her bosom, how great was the inward emotion that she was enduring.

"I will, on the contrary, proceed to lay before you the mission with which I am intrusted," he continued, a little hurriedly, "and if, during my statement, any question should arise that will enable me to combat the morbid views which I will venture to say you needlessly entertain, it will be fair ground on which to meet you, and will, I have no doubt, rob the discussion of at least much of the pain it might otherwise entail upon you."

With an effort, Floret turned to him, and said, in a subdued tone:

"Proceed, my Lord, I will listen to you."

"I thank you," he said, with a gratified expression—whether assumed or not is of no consequence; it was, at least, intended that she should believe it to be such, and she did think so. "Before I proceed any further," he added, "allow me to request of you to favor me with the name by which throughout our discourse, and in future, I shall address you."

She looked full in his face, with a sudden movement, which almost startled him. He saw, however, by the expression of unutterable pain and misery which appeared on her deathly white features, that his abrupt question had inflicted upon her the most severe and acute torture.



With some embarrassment he said, hastily, and in an earnest tone :

"You will remember that I know you only by the name which you gave to me when I was but a boy, and you a mere child. When I met you upon one Thursday in Trentham Wood, you told me that your name was the *POOR GIRL*; and that though you were called occasionally by the name of Floret, you preferred the former title."

She burst into a passion of tears, and sobbed violently—so violently, that Lord Victor appeared greatly distressed by her emotion.

And through her tears she said, wildly :

"Call me by that name—address me alone as the *POOR GIRL*. It is now the only name I can justly claim—it is the only name which truly conveys my most miserable condition."

"I beg of you to exert the better qualities of your mind," responded Lord Victor, gravely, "and compose yourself. These wild bursts of grief injure you—surely they serve you nothing. Let me entreat you to control your anguish, and to look forward hopefully to a brighter term of your life."

"That is impossible, my Lord!" she exclaimed, almost vehemently, and added, impatiently: "I am prepared to endure my fate—to go through it to the end henceforward without a vain murmur or useless complaining. I know the worst—and knowing it, am prepared to bear it; but I am not, and I feel that I never shall be, able to endure such discussions respecting it as this, which is now, my Lord, taking place between you and me. Spare me, I implore you—take your departure from me, and forget me—forget that one who is unconscious how she has deserved of Heaven a fate so miserable as that which she has had to undergo, and will have to endure, ever had any existence."

He gazed at her with sorrowful earnestness.

"I listen to you, Floret," he rejoined—adopting the name which, in his estimation, was the least objectionable of the two which had been submitted to him to select from—"I listen to you heedfully, and I will treat your wishes with respect when I have lost all hope of making you think differently to what you do now. But there is something due to you from others who are interested in your fate which you have no right to control. An individual afflicted with dire despair may fling himself into a river with the view of ending his life; it is the duty of those who may observe him to rescue him, if they can, and he has no right to resist them. Because, in the first place, he is in the commission of a sinful act, and, in the second, it is impossible for him to foresee what happy change in his destiny may possibly occur. You are very young, Floret—too young to entertain such a sentiment as hopeless despair—too premature in nourishing it before you know that there is not a path or loophole of escape for you existing. Let me repeat that I know something of your history—more than you can imagine—

more than I believe you are yourself acquainted with."

Floret covered her eyes with her trembling fingers, and slowly shook her head.

"Listen to me, Floret," he said, gently, but impressively. "You are aware how we met in Trentham Wood. On that occasion, you made the impression on me that you were no common child. Boy as I was, I had heard that gipsies kidnapped the children of the rich, and brought them up in obscurity until they were of an age which enabled them to make money of them, either by restoring them to their parents, or by keeping them ignorant of their real condition, while they extorted sums from the person unjustly in possession of their property. I concluded, then, that you were the child of some wealthy parents, who had been so kidnapped, and as such I treasured you in my memory. I was laughed at as being Quixotic when I suggested that you ought to be rescued, and I was reasoned with upon what was termed my folly, for it was suggested to me that, even if my supposition proved correct, the gipsies would refuse to reveal your parentage, and if it proved incorrect, I should be taking a gipsy child away from its natural protectors."

"I was bound to listen and obey; but neither the ridicule nor the reasoning induced me to change my opinion. I preserved it in secret, under the strange impression that I should some day be the means of your deliverance. We met at Ascot races—a strange event happened there, which confirmed me in my opinion; but I was debarred from interference, because I believed that you had been recovered by your friends. Still the belief clung to me that we should meet again, and that I should in some way prove instrumental to your restoration to that position to which, it was my opinion, that you were born. I did meet you again, and placed you in the care of the Countess of Brackleigh. From her custody you were abstracted by the old villain in whose clutches I afterward discovered you, and from whose power I was prevented, through my own hasty indiscretion and want of proper precaution, from rescuing you. Although you were borne away, I still felt convinced that I should again meet with you, and, owing to the fortunate circumstance of my dear friend, Hyde Vaughan, having encountered the young lady who was your companion in Trentham Wood here in the house of an old and valued servant of my father's—I mean Mrs. Spencer—I have been enabled to do so. As soon as he quitted here, he communicated with me. I hastened to assure myself that you were really in this house, and then I presented myself to the Countess of Brackleigh, who seems to know very much of your history, who is deeply interested in your fate, and who asserts, under the impression of some secret and important knowledge, that her destiny is interwoven with yours. It is to represent her that I am here. I have no claim, merely on account of my interest in your future and my



sympathy with your past life and present position, to appear before you, to intrude upon your privacy, even to address you; but as the delegate of another person who has a claim upon you, because she is acquainted with an important secret which will enable you to assert momentous rights, I am justly here to speak with you, and to endeavor to obtain from you an appointment with Lady Brackleigh, which, whatever may be its results to her ladyship, cannot fail to be to your advantage."

He paused, and remained silent, with the evident object of obtaining from her a reply to his request, which he had rather intimated than put.

She had been making some strong efforts at composure while he had been speaking, and so far succeeded, that she was enabled to remove her hand from before her eyes, and to look steadfastly at him.

As he gazed upon her colorless face, he was struck more than ever, not only by the exceeding beauty of her countenance, but by the singular delicacy and refinement of her features. Constant exposure to the air, a long period of privation, trouble, and anxiety had failed to rob her exquisitely fair skin of its transparency, or her features of their classic delicacy of form. Lord Victor saw in them a type of his own high-bred class, and though he had enough romance in his composition to urge him to the commission of acts at which the worldly-minded would sneer, he had enough plain matter-of-fact sense to know that Floret was descended from no common origin, and to see that attrition with the world had purified rather than contaminated her.

Whatever might have been the real nature of his feelings toward her previous to this interview, that one glance at her fair, sad face did more to fix her indelibly upon his heart than aught which had ever happened before.

Floret did not interpret the expression that was slowly passing over his features as he pursued hers; her mind was too intent upon a resolution to decline the request he had put to her, and how to express it without fastening too much humiliation on herself.

"I am at a loss to imagine how the destiny of the lady whom you have named can be mixed up with mine," she said, slowly and sorrowfully; "I hope for her sake that it is not. I know now—I have but recently been put in possession of it—as much of my history as it is needful for me to know; it is enough to make me certain that no change for the better can take place in my position, and that any effort to learn more than I know now will result in further pain to myself, without improving my situation one iota. My lot henceforward must be lonely obscurity on—on to the end. With the world I have nothing more in common, save to wring from it the means of sustaining life, nothing more. Of it I have nothing to ask but forgetfulness. For what you have done to serve me, my Lord, I thank you gratefully, for your good intentions I am

likewise most grateful; and here, in mercy, let our interview end. You will pity and understand, and obey me when I tell you that I am nameless, and that I must remain so to the end."

She sank half fainting upon a chair as she concluded.

He bent over her, and in a low tone, and with deep emotion, said:

"That crime is not yours. I were unworthy the name I inherit, the form I bear—the likeness of God himself, whose attribute is justice as well as mercy—if I did not find in your revelation a deeper and a holier claim to my service than before. I can measure the magnitude of your anguish when you reflect on such a condition as you mention being yours. If sympathy would reach that grief, I would deeply sympathize with you, but it would be ineffectual. You are of no common origin, that is palpable to me; that you should feel such a stigma with more acute agony than some so unfortunately situated who have smaller claim to look for stern integrity in those who preceded them, I can understand; but what I cannot understand is, that you should assume that you are what you have stated yourself to be, unless you possess information that is wholly indisputable, which forbids you entertaining hope."

"I believe that I do," she said, in a scarcely audible tone.

"Documentary evidence?" suggested Lord Victor, emphatically.

"No, I have nothing of that kind," she replied, plaintively, "but—"

"I have documentary evidence to prove that you are not nameless!" exclaimed a voice, clearly and impressively.

Floret raised her eyes, and Lord Victor turned hastily round.

In the doorway stood the Countess of Brackleigh!

## CHAPTER XXIV.

"And suddenly her former color changed, And here and there her eyes through anger ranged; And, like a planet moving several ways, At one self instant, she, poor soul! assayed Loving, not to love at all, and every part strove to resist the motions of her heart: And hands so pure, so innocent, nay, such As might have made Heaven stoop to have a touch, Did she uphold." —MARLOWE.

The apparition of the Countess of Brackleigh in the doorway appeared to startle Lord Victor Trentham as much as it did Floret, and to surprise and confound him even more than it did her.

The Countess observed, with a furtive glance, his unequivocal and anything but gratified look of amazement, and the expression of alarm and distress which appeared suddenly upon Floret's features.

With the quickness of thought, the Countess entered the room, closed the door, locked it, and took possession of the key, which she at once placed in a pocket in her dress.

Lord Victor's astonishment visibly increased—he was evidently annoyed and angry.



"Lady Brackleigh," he said, in a grave tone, "I certainly did not anticipate that you would follow me here; much less could I have imagined that you would take such a strange proceeding as—"

The Countess waved her hand impatiently, and, interrupting him, said:

"You know not, Lord Victor, what vital interests are at stake. You may have, I acknowledge, a suspicion of some part of the truth; but you cannot have the slightest conception of the real and terrible facts involved in the affair in which I am now taking so active a participation, or of the magnitude of the result to all the parties concerned in it. To me the issue will be of the gravest character, and I am, therefore, compelled to take steps which, though they may appear questionable in your eyes, as in the eyes of others, are, nevertheless, in my position, justifiable. Believe me, Lord Victor, I have been most deeply wronged. I cannot yet explain to you how. It must, for the present, suffice that I can imagine no greater personal injury than that which I have received, and I believe it to be irreparable. The *dénouement* of a mystery, in which I have for a dreary period been enshrouded, cannot long be deferred. I do not, I cannot expect to be, in a merely worldly point of view, benefited by it. Socially, perhaps, I shall be lowered and pitied—I hate to be pitied; but, Lord Victor, I shall secure a terrible atonement for a monstrous act of treachery, the victims of which have been myself and this poor girl," she concluded, pointing to Floret.

"I cannot for a moment doubt a word that your ladyship has uttered," rejoined Lord Victor, as she ceased, preserving still his grave tone and manner; "but you will remember that when I undertook your mission hither, it was with the understanding that I should execute it entirely after my own discretion; that Floret—she will pardon my familiar use of her name—should neither be startled, worried, coerced into taking any course which might be opposed to her inclination; that she should be free to act as she might wish, and that, should she desire to remain in undisturbed and secluded retirement, an unqualified deference should be paid to her resolve. As I was to be the medium through whom you preferred your proposition, so it was arranged I was to be the bearer to you of Floret's decision."

"I admit, Lord Victor, that I consented to the arrangement," returned Lady Brackleigh, quickly; "but it was because I had no alternative. You told me that you had discovered the residence of the young girl who had been kidnapped from those to whose charge I had intrusted her at Relgate; but you declined to tell me where that residence was to be found. You, Lord Victor, certainly offered to bear from me a communication to the young, sadly used girl; but you fashioned it yourself. You objected to this; you declined to repeat that; you, in short, placed yourself in my position, and decided to say what you deemed to

be most proper—not what my judgment told me was essential. I bowed to you; I permitted you to have your own way, because I foresaw that it was the only way to obtain mine. You had acquainted me—thoughtlessly, no doubt—with the hour at which you should seek an interview with this young girl. I watched you from your house; I followed you; I am here; I have overheard your conversation; I am in possession of this poor child's impression respecting her parentage, and I interfered at the moment I thought to be the most favorable to her interests and to my own. It is necessary to dispel from her mind a belief which, if she is permitted to cherish it, will paralyze her action. It is essential to her fame, name, honor, that she should act; but she cannot do it as you have found her, as you would leave her, with a crushing horror upon her brain—with a frozen heart. I am here to remove that cloud from her brow—to bring back warm life-blood to her heart—to tear from her soul that taint which she deems the murkiest that can soil and stain her fair fame—to lift her, indeed, from the sepulchre of ruined hopes into the sunshine of a brilliant future. To accomplish this—to her, in all likelihood, a seemingly impossible feat—I must have an interview with her alone. I must beg this of your courtesy, my lord, and of our young friend's good sense."

Lady Brackleigh paused for an answer, for, somewhat bewildered by her observations, she remained silent when she ceased speaking. Presently, however, he said:

"In describing the part I have taken, Lady Brackleigh, you have not exaggerated the truth. I, however, adopted the course I pursued from a conviction that, if women in some transactions of their lives consider consequences, they never do in revenge. You have declared yourself to be greatly wronged?"

"Most foully; most atrociously," she responded, emphatically.

"And you are striving after revenge?" he subjoined.

"I admit it," she answered, with excitement; "an ample, full, complete revenge."

"Lady Brackleigh," he returned, quickly and impressively, as he pointed to Floret; "surely this young lady has endured enough of trial and vicissitude, difficulty, danger, and misery, to save her from being subjected even to the chance of further suffering. In striving after your own aims, Lady Brackleigh, you should remember—"

"That I shall have a companion who has been as deeply wronged, and who has suffered even more than myself," she abruptly interposed. "I shall not forget it. I am not likely to forget it. She has no need to fear the future. Even if she does incur some rebuffs, even if she should have to endure further struggles, her reward must come; mine can only be to bury myself in seclusion from that world into which she will enter a bright star, the object of wonder and of admiration. A world which, while it showers upon her happi-



ness, will consign me to pining oblivion. You have no occasion to be under any alarm for Floret, Lord Victor; as I can achieve nothing without her, so must I, even if I had not the inclination, be as tender of her as though she were some near and dear connection of my own; with whom my existence was bound up, whose death would be fatal to every hope of future peace nourished in my breast."

"Why take, then, the extraordinary step, Lady Brackleigh, on entering the room, of closing the door behind you, locking it, and securing the key?" asked Lord Victor, who seemed not to be satisfied with Lady Brackleigh's explanation.

"I will be frank with you, my Lord," returned the Countess, readily. "From what fell from the lips of this young, persecuted creature here, I gathered that she was weary of discussions upon her origin—nay, that she shrank from them with aversion, with loathing, and with a painful sense of humiliation. I suspected that as soon as her eyes fell upon me she would fly me. Not from fear of me, nor from hatred, but having formed a conviction, which I shall prove to her to be erroneous, she would naturally be averse to reopen a subject, the only seeming result of which would be to add anguish to the affliction she has already been compelled to endure, and would, therefore, take the readiest way of preventing it by avoiding me. To insure her attention to what I have to communicate to her, I have locked the door, and I hold the key. I assure her before you, my Lord, that what I shall reveal to her will not add to her anguish, but that it will dissipate it—that if happiness can be brought to a heart which, perhaps, hitherto has never known it, I shall place it there; and I now ask of her to grant me a private interview at once, and I pledge to her my faith—the faith of one who has never violated her word—that, if at the close of the interview which I now solicit she determines to continue the course which, prior to seeing me to-day, she has marked out for herself to pursue, I will no further interfere with her, but, on the contrary, do what lies in my power to aid her in carrying out her wishes."

The Countess ceased speaking; and Lord Victor, who had watched her countenance closely during her speech, turned to Floret to hear what she had to reply.

The poor girl, disturbed and distressed by those frequent references to her birth and her condition before Lord Victor, and even by him, sat with her face covered with her hands. Her skin was whiter than snow; there might have been, now and then, a crimson flushing, but at no time did it last more than a second. Her pride was sorely tried. Under most circumstances she would have felt much at such a discussion, but, before Lord Victor, it was painfully humiliating.

It was her secret and dearest wish—a dream, a passionate day-dream—to shine in his eyes "one entire and perfect crystalite". It had been her fate to be seen and known by him as

a poor girl—always a poor girl; and now she had to bear the humiliation of appearing before him—of even acknowledging to him that she was of a tainted origin.

She could not but believe that these discoveries by him would be subversive of all interest he might ever have felt in her fate, and that, when he that day parted from her, it would be not only for ever, but to forget, as soon as she was shut from his eyes, that she had ever lived.

She was unacquainted with the nature of a true man; certainly with such a nature as that possessed by Lord Victor. He had been struck by her singular beauty when he had met her in the wood, and when she, in gratitude for his timely interference in her behalf, presented to him the bouquet she had arranged. How much, indeed, Mrs. Spencer's anecdote had revealed! His admiration of her charms had been heightened when he saw her in her blue cotton frock and tawdry wreath at Ascot; and it was yet farther increased when he encountered her, neatly dressed, near to Hyde Park, and he first introduced her to the notice of the Countess of Brackleigh.

The circumstances under which they had met had also greatly interested him, and many times when at college, especially when alone at night with his thoughts, her sweet, fair face would recur to him, her softly-beaming, deep blue eyes would shine upon him, and he would note the silent eloquence in them, which was more powerful than any words she might have used, as she tendered him again, in imagination, her simple offering. He would remember, too, with a species of marveling wonder, the scornful expression of resentment which appeared upon her still young and beautiful face, when, by the side of Lady Brackleigh's carriage, she reminded him that he had given her money, and treated her as—a beggar! when he could only know her as such, and nothing else. He remembered her far more frequently than she, even in her most hopeful and dreamy moments, could have believed possible; and he did so without asking himself what was the nature of that influence which could so often bring her exquisitely-formed features before his admiring vision.

Certainly, when he encountered her in the wood, in the hands of the gipsies, her increased height and age had the effect of assuring him that the bud had given no promise the blossom would not realize. She was thin and delicate in appearance, and was clothed in faded habiliments; but she was still most beautiful in countenance, and queenly in her bearing, and her voice, though plaintive in tone, was as melodious as it had ever been.

He thought of her yet more frequently after that event; and now that he beheld her neatly and tastefully attired, and though sad in countenance, still greatly improved in her healthful appearance, the interest he had taken in her all along was not likely to diminish.



No—not likely to diminish, after he had witnessed her bitter tears, and listened to her passionate sobbing, observed her deep distress, and felt his whole soul moved to pity for her—that pity which is not derogatory to the object, but which is the sentiment nearest allied to love.

No; Floret had small occasion to fear that she would be forsaken and forgotten to Lord Victor. Hers was not the position in the heart of a true man which was calculated to make him careless whether he ever saw her more, or which would cause him to forget her as if she had never been.

Lord Victor, while the Countess was addressing him, regarded Floret with tender interest, and, bending over her, said, in a gentle tone, yet one which was so modulated as to induce her to have confidence in him:

"You have heard what the Countess has said, Floret; you have heard her express a wish to be closeted with you alone. Are you prepared to accede to it? or do you desire to decline the proposition? Speak freely and frankly—believe me, your wishes will be respected."

He laid so peculiar an emphasis upon the last three words, that Floret was fain to look up gratefully to him.

She rose up from the chair upon which she had been seated, and, addressing him, said:

"My lord, I thank you deeply for the interest you evince in my unhappy condition, and for the kind consideration you have shown for my feelings—feelings which have been so often and so acutely lacerated. I had hoped, by burying myself in obscurity, to end all the woes and suffering which have attended me from my birth, until my life ended a term which could not, to meet my yearning desire, be too brief; but it is not to be, and I must yield to a power I cannot control. My gratitude to your lordship is not the less deep because you have not accomplished what I have earnestly wished."

She bowed low to him, but did not trust her eyes to gaze upon his face. She turned them upon the Countess:

"Your ladyship requests me to speak with you alone?" she exclaimed, in an undertone, which trembled slightly in its intonation; and you urge me to assent, by suggestions which can hardly fail to have weight with me, although I fear you are deceiving yourself with regard to the result."

"Indeed, Floret, you will find that I am not," interpolated the Countess, with emphasis.

"If I had hope, I should hope that you prognosticate truly," she continued; "but I have lost hope, and can expect no gleam of sunshine in my dark fate. Nevertheless, from the intimations which you have given, I feel it to be my duty to listen to you. I am eager to know all that I can learn respecting my unfortunate history. I do not think any additional particulars, however unpleasant in themselves, can add to my burden; and there may be some that may tend, at a future period,

to soften reflections which, without them, would be indescribably bitter."

"Then for the present I leave you," said Lord Victor, promptly addressing her, as she concluded; "but I hope to see you again, and that ere long—to see you, Floret, under brighter auspices, and in the direct road to that brilliant happiness which Lady Brackleigh has so agreeably foreshadowed."

He bowed to her, and she bent to him; she did not raise her eyes—she dared not. She thought, perhaps, that he might tender her his hand; she felt that hers would tremble when it touched his; but he did not offer it, and, with a suppressed sigh, she stood motionless, with her eyes bent upon the ground.

"Lady Brackleigh," he added, "I shall await you in the apartment of Mrs. Spencer, at the bottom of the house, in order that I may attend your ladyship to your carriage."

"It is not here, Lord Victor," she replied; "but I shall be thankful for your escort home."

"I shall be at your ladyship's service," he rejoined; and, so saying, he quitted the room, leaving, as it seemed to Floret, a dull and heavy gloom behind him.

She could not tell whether he gazed upon her as he left. She heard the door unlock; she heard it closed and relocked. She heard the sweep of a silk dress, and she saw its flounced folds trailing the floor close to her own! but she saw not what she would have given a world to see as it departed from her—the face of Lord Victor. Instead of it, she saw that of Lady Brackleigh.

She started as she now gazed steadfastly at it. She had not forgotten it, although she was very ill when she first, and even last, beheld it, and three long wearisome years had since then passed away. She saw a terrible change in it. It was pale, thin, and furrowed—care of the most desolating kind was stamped upon it. In the set of the brows, the eyelids, the corners of the mouth, there was only grief. Not a trace of a smile lurking there could be detected, and it seemed that nothing imaginable could bring it out of there.

Floret perceived that she was not alone a sufferer, and that high station afforded no exemption from human misery.

The alteration in Lady Brackleigh's face, and the attendant reflection, made her more disposed to listen heedfully and with interest to what she had to say. It was apparent that in some way the Countess's history was mixed up with her own, and that she had, as all other persons had who had been in any way connected with her, suffered deeply in consequence.

The Countess, however, gave her no time to ruminate. She caught her by the wrist, and, with flashing eyes, said—

"Floret, you have admitted that you are acquainted with the particulars of your origin. What are they? Repeat them to me."

Floret for an instant was startled and surprised. By a sudden movement she wrested



her hand from the clutch of the Countess and said, almost haughtily:

"This is an abrupt request for which your ladyship has not prepared me. It surely cannot be the single object of your ladyship in effecting this interview to seek from me a revelation which it is my first wish to keep concealed within the depths of my own bosom. If this be not the sole purpose of your ladyship's presence here, I request you to submit to me such other motives as may have induced you to visit me; but if it be your only reason, I must beg of your ladyship to spare me the pain of replying to it."

"Girl, you know not what I have suffered—what I do suffer," exclaimed the Countess, wildly; "you know but a tithe of the truth at which you would arrive—at which you must arrive, or perish a nameless creature. I must conquer all the truth, not to win a brighter name and unalloyed happiness, but to end a torture which is rapidly slaying me, and win—a convent and a grave."

She paused, and wept passionately.

Then flinging back her head, and dashing away with an impatient hand her tears, she continued—

"Has it not occurred to you, that I have a story to reveal to you? Have the questions not presented themselves to you—'Why does she seek me? What can my unhappy history be to her? Can I be connected with her unhappiness?—if so, how, in what manner, and under what circumstances? Can the relatives to whom I am allied be connected with her? In what relation can she stand to be, and I to her?'"

Floret interrupted her with a sudden coarse scream. She placed both hands upon her heart, and recoiled half a dozen steps: her face became a ghastly white, and her lips livid. She looked as if she would fall lifeless upon the ground.

The Countess, excited as she was, perceived Floret's sudden and terrible agitation with amazement, and then a thought flashed through her mind, and a strange, vindictive smile for a moment moved her lips.

She advanced to Floret, and said, as she raised her hand with a deprecating gesture:

"Calm your agitation. I am not she for whom you take me. Your filial instinct is in error if it turned even for an instant to me. My words have misled you. No, when you seek for your mother, look first in your glass, peruse well the features which will be there presented to you, examine them well, scrutinize each feature, fasten them upon your memory, and when you go in search of the woman who bore you, and find a face which closely resembles that which you have studied in the glass, you may say to yourself, 'I have found her.' Then fling your arms fondly about her neck, and rest your head upon her bosom—if you can!" Floret sighed deeply, and turned her head away.

"It had been better I had never been born," she exclaimed, bitterly.

"Better that she who bore you had died ere she gave you birth," cried the Countess, sternly. "I, at least, should have been spared a broken heart."

The frown which rested on her brow, when she uttered those words, passed away as her eye fell upon Floret's face; it was so woe-begone and despairing that it made her heart ache to look upon it.

She sighed, too, and then said:

"Floret, child, it will not do for you and me to act otherwise than in concert; we have both an aim to achieve, which can scarcely be accomplished unless we act in unison. I shall have no reserve with you; you must have none with me. We are traveling to the same end: we must do it with one mind, one intelligence, and without concealments. I, who know your history—or, at least, have become mistress of much of it—marvel how you could have learned it. The source from whence you have derived your information is unknown to me, therefore I desire to learn how much has been communicated to you, and who was your informant. My motive is this. I shall hear how much of the truth has been told to you, how much kept back. I shall hear who revealed to you your history, and shall be able to judge the motive with which it has been imparted to you. Speak, Floret, openly and truthfully, for I again repeat I shall be able to disabuse your mind of a grievous error which it is nursing, and place hope back in the seat from whence you believe that it has departed for ever."

Floret gazed at her wistfully, earnestly, and with an expression of distress on her countenance.

"What shall I do?" she murmured, with painful embarrassment. "This perplexity is new to me. I am rarely in doubt as to the course I should pursue, yet I know not what to do. To refuse to take part with you seems to be the ringing of the death-knell to my dearest hopes. Yet if I league with you I shall be conspiring against those whom nature tells me I ought to uphold and defend."

"Nature sometimes sets us strange tasks," responded Lady Brackleigh. "It is not always wise or prudent to follow her teachings. However, let me relieve your mind of a fear that I shall desire you to conspire or scheme against any one, even those who have most injured you. I shall require nothing of the kind. I wish you only to help me to establish your claim to an honorable name, though worn by a—. Well, it will not become me to call names, I must prove them. A coronet may sit upon a smirched brow, I leave the world to furnish the proper epithets. Do you understand me better now, Floret?"

"I think I do," she replied, musingly, "and will answer to your first question. My knowledge of my origin may be comprised in a few words. I have been told that I am the offspring of shame—of one who loved fondly, and trusted too confidingly to a heartless man. That my mother was high born, but not there-



fore exempt from the evils of temptation which surround the humbler members of her sex. As I was brought into the world in secret, so I was immediately sent into obscurity, was reared first in a village, and was afterward kidnapped by gipsies. I have lived since then a life of strange vicissitudes, with some of which you have been acquainted. That is my whole history!"

The Countess listened to her attentively, and gazed fixedly at her for a minute after she ceased speaking.

At length she said, slowly :

"And that is all?"

Floret bowed her head in silent assent.

"Who communicated to you this story?" inquired the countess.

"Hagar Lot!" replied Floret.

"Who?" ejaculated the Countess, with surprise.

Floret repeated the name briefly.

"Who is she?" asked the Countess, quickly.

"A gipsy!" returned Floret. "She it was who took me from Beachborough, and placed me with the old gipsy who made me sell flowers for a living. It was she who removed me from him, and placed me at a school in Yorkshire; and who, in short, acknowledged to me that she was an agent of—of my—"

The word seemed to choke her in its way to utterance, and she turned her face aside, leaving the word unsaid.

"I understand you," observed the Countess, thoughtfully. "The woman was the agent of your mother. Yet this is strange—I was informed that her name was Shelley, and that she was found—"

Floret raised her hands deprecatingly.

"Do not speak of her," she said, hurriedly and excitedly. "Her death rests like a burden upon my shoulders, although I was innocent of it—yet, had I not been born, she would have been living now. She was my first nurse; it was Hagar Lot who stole me from the care of those to whom she left me a miserable legacy."

"This is something new," muttered the Countess; "I must see this gipsy."

Then raising her voice, she inquired :

"Do you know how to find her, Floret?"

Floret shuddered slightly, and replied :

"I do not. I do not wish to know. She gave me the opportunity of communicating with her, but I refused her offer with scorn and loathing."

"I can believe you," replied the Countess. "Yet it will be essential to me to discover her, and I will."

She paused for a moment, and then she observed, almost abruptly :

"Did she communicate to you the name of your mother?"

Floret gasped for breath.

She made, however, an effort, and controlling her emotion, replied :

"I requested her to reveal it to me, but she declined."

"Why?" asked the Countess.

"She expressed a fear that I desired to know it in order that I might curse her," returned Floret, with a sudden flush upon her forehead; "but—"

"She measured your nature by her own, doubtless," interposed the Countess. "Pray, did she betray the same reluctance to mention the name of your—father, Floret?"

Floret let fall her eyelids. This cross-examination was very painful to her, but she made an effort, and answered, excitedly :

"I declined to hear it. Lady Brackleigh, what to me was his name, or the name of the mother who bore me? They had fastened upon me an inheritance of shame, and doomed me to a life of obscurity. It would surely be better that I should not know a name, to hear which would pierce my heart each time it was mentioned—a name which I should never bear, or bearing, loathe. No, Lady Brackleigh, I revealed to you all that I knew in the first few sentences which I uttered respecting my life, and I have no more to tell. You only needlessly and profitlessly probe my heart, when you desire to extract that which I do not possess, and cannot, therefore, communicate."

"I will not at present press you further," said the Countess; "but I will proceed to place your history in a new light. You are the daughter of a Marchioness!" she exclaimed, with an abrupt emphasis.

A painful expression, but not one of surprise, crossed Floret's features.

"Hagar Lot told me so," she said.

"And that your father was an Earl?" added the Countess, with a strange, low, hoarse screech.

Floret looked at her with wonder.

"She did," she replied.

The Countess gaped twice or thrice.

"This confirms it!" she exclaimed; and, clasping her hands to her temples, she sank upon a chair.

Floret approached her, but she waved her impatiently away.

"Do not come near me!" she exclaimed, agitatedly; "I must wrestle with this spasm alone."

She bowed her face in her hands, and bent her head down low. She rocked her body to and fro for a minute or so, evidently in extreme pain, and then rose up and paced the apartment with rapid and disordered steps.

Presently, she paused abruptly, and said :

"The woman—this gipsy—this agent of whom you have spoken, did not communicate to you the name of your mother?"

"She did not," replied Floret.

"Nor of him—your father?" she continued, in a species of convulsive emotion.

"She did not," repeated Floret.

"She only said that your mother loved and trusted, and that your father was a scoundrel!" pursued the Countess, between her teeth.

Floret bowed her head assentingly.

"She lied!" cried the Countess, between her teeth. Floret started, and gazed upon her with eager amazement.



"She lied!" continued the Countess, speaking rapidly, "knowingly, or because even she was deceived by her employer. Your mother might have been an artless girl at the age of sixteen; but she was not so weak and guileless—not so trusting, as to yield herself up to the man she loved, until he had first accompanied her to church, and placed, before an ordained priest, a wedding-ring upon her finger."

Floret clutched at the Countess's wrist wildly, and tried two or three times to speak, but not a sound came from her parted, ashen lips.

"I tell you, girl, that what I say is true, and can be proved; but that the proofs will be attended with some little difficulty!" exclaimed the Countess, with excitement. "But it shall be done, though my heart be crumbled to dust—it shall be done! You, Floret, are the offspring of a secret marriage. You are legitimately borne, and you may, with a proud gesture, now dash away from your cheek the blush of shame which has only too frequently mantled there."

Floret pressed her temples with both her hands. The apartment seemed to reel round her. The daughter of a Marchioness—the daughter of an Earl—and legitimately born—the intelligence appeared to be too good, too overwhelmingly blissful to be true.

Then a shade passed over her expressive features.

"Tell me, Lady Brackleigh, were my parents under age when they were married?" she asked, with intense eagerness.

"One certainly was: the Earl was probably a minor, also," the Countess replied, inquiring also why she put the question.

"I have heard," said Floret, tremblingly, "that when such marriages are made without the consent of the parents, they can be annulled. Is it so?"

"If proceedings were taken while the married pair were minors, it might be done, but not without extreme difficulty," returned the Countess; "but nothing of the sort was done in this case. The marriage was clandestine, and has been kept a close secret ever since."

"Yet you have discovered it?" said Floret, in an inquiring tone.

"I have," rejoined the Countess, with bitterness. "It was fitting that I should; it concerned me deeply. Secrets sneak out of strange loopholes. I gained my information by singular means; I shall work out my long-cherished aim by means equally strange, yet terribly sure."

"As I have heard one version of my birth, and you have furnished me with another, how shall I be convinced which is the true one?" observed Floret, with a thoughtful and somewhat perplexed air.

"Do you place my word by the side of that of a gipsy, and hesitate which to credit?" asked the Countess, haughtily and reproachfully.

"O Lady Brackleigh, I only desire to be assured that your version is, as I wish it to be,

the correct one," said Floret, with emotion. "Hagar Lot was the agent of—"

"A paid agent of one to whom the discovery of your birth by others would be a heavy blow," replied the Countess, quickly. "She had a motive in deceiving you; she read your character correctly; she knew it would keep you quiet. But still, you had only her bare word in support of her assertion. I will give you a written proof."

"A document!" murmured Floret, mechanically.

"A copy of the certificate of your mother's marriage with your father!" exclaimed the Countess, slowly and emphatically. "A marriage which never has, and never can, be set aside. Will you see it?"

"Though I knew that death would follow the sight, I would see it!" exclaimed Floret, with convulsive emotion.

The Countess passed her hands across her eyes, and passed one of them upon her heart.

"It shall be so!" she muttered, inwardly. "He shall see her, and before me. I will watch every change in his countenance when his eyes fall first upon his unacknowledged child."

Then, with a deep breath, she turned her face to Floret, and said:

"I have it locked up in a desk in my own private boudoir at Brackleigh House. Will you accompany me thither, and I will show it to you?"

"I will," said Floret, promptly.

"Now?" asked the Countess.

"This moment," returned Floret.

"Attire yourself, and we will depart instantly," said the Countess.

Floret hastened to her chamber to put on her shawl and bonnet, and the Countess, as she looked after her, murmured:

"The plot thickens—the end draws near—and then rest—rest! When will this weary heart know rest?"

## CHAPTER XXV.

"'Tis an awful thing  
To touch such mischief as I now conceive.  
So men sit shivering on the dewy bank,  
And try the chill stream with their feet; once in—'  
—SHELLEY.

Three years elapsed between the departure of the Marquis and the Marchioness of Westchester from England and their return. In that period, how much had happened to relieve Constance Marchioness of Westchester from the fear of being subjected to an indictment for bigamy, and how much to confirm her apprehensions that such must be her fate at last?

As we have seen, she, with a reckless daring, which in some instances she unhesitatingly displayed, gave to the Marquis the alternative of parting from her forever, if he declined to accept her proposition to go abroad. He decided not to part with her, and they went abroad.

Her impression was that her secret departure from London would relieve her, not from



the importunit but from the persecution of Bertram, Earl of Brackleigh.

She still loved the man. For his character she entertained the profoundest contempt; but he still wielded a fascination over the weaker part of her nature, which it cost her a mighty and a constant struggle to forget.

This was not an anomaly alone in the character of Constance, it is common to woman. There is this peculiarity in the love of woman, that she loves a man for himself. She might be wrought up to a pitch of adoration if he possessed all the attributes which ennoble his sex; but if in some plausible guise he wins her love, she will love him still, even after having discovered him to be an unworthy scoundrel. His character is to her a thing apart, and when once she has yielded up her heart to him, though seas may divide them and years part them, the influence he once possessed, if it lie dormant, is never wholly destroyed.

Constance had loved Bertram with the full, gushing, passionate love of a young girl of an ardent, willful temperament. She had loved him without reserve, and had married him in defiance of consequences. When his love became passive in its character, she began to fancy herself slighted; her pride took the alarm—her pride for the time overrode her love, and we know the result.

So long as he did not cross her path, her lip curled with disdainful scorn when she thought of him: yet her cheek flushed, her bosom heaved, and an unbidden wish that they had never parted would form itself, and disturb her forced calmness more than she liked to silently confess.

Even though she quitted London to avoid him, and she had made an inward resolve to forget him if she could, his form would obtrude itself upon her vision, and a secret urging in his favor would, in spite of her efforts to chase it away, torment her, only too frequently.

She arrived with the Marquis in Paris, and they immediately plunged into a round of gayety. They had the *entree* to the highest circles, and they, apparently by tacit consent—for their movements were never submitted to each other—attended a soiree, ball, or breakfast *à la fourchette*, to which they received invitations.

By a kind of tacit agreement, they avoided being alone together. The Marquis, with a horrible suspicion pressing upon his brain, felt that he could not sit alone with her and not revert to what had happened. He knew that if he did so he should draw down upon himself words of scorn and insult, at which his pride would revolt, and he should obtain no satisfaction. He would have been content with her solemn assurance that he had no just cause for his suspicions; but she had always refused to enter upon the subject at all, invited him to think as he pleased, and never hesitated to express her readiness to separate from him, if he felt dissatisfied with the wretched incertitude in which he had been placed by his apprehensions that her conduct before they were mar-

ried had not been so circumspect as, in her high position, it should have been.

The Marchioness did not let the world perceive that she had an undying worm ever gnawing at her heart. Her eye was bright, her complexion dazzlingly fair, her cheek round, and her step springy, though proud.

She was only pale—very pale.

The shrewdest of her own sex decided that she had a concealed love preying upon her mind. Men said that she was proud, haughty, and of a nature which had no love in its composition. An iceberg, indeed, in the shape of an exquisitely-formed woman.

She was indeed, an iceberg to them. A few, who believed that they had claims to flirt with an Empress, approached her, flattered her, courted her, intimated that they were dazzled by her beauty, and were her slaves. They could advance no farther—the look of immeasurable scorn, the freezing contempt with which she responded to such addresses, placed them *hors de combat* instantaneously.

It became a by-word in the high circles in which they moved, that the man who bent a look of loving admiration upon the lovely Marchioness of Westchester was immediately buried beneath an avalanche of snow.

At one of the most brilliant fetes given at the Tuileries, the Marquis of Westchester happened, for a few minutes, to be promenading by the side of the Marchioness.

They came suddenly face to face with the Earl and Countess of Brackleigh.

It was a strange encounter.

The two men instantly recognized each other, and the flashing look which passed between them was such as is given by men who thirst for each other's lives, and will be satisfied with no less.

The Countess of Brackleigh gazed into the eyes of the Marchioness with the fiery expression of a woman who, knowing that she has been wronged, beholds the guilty creature before her. The Marchioness returned her glance with one of ineffable disdain.

The meeting, the recognition, the glances were but the work of a moment; they passed on, and were speedily divided by a huge crowd of magnificently-attired men and women.

"Westchester!" exclaimed the Marchioness, within a minute afterward, calmly, but with determination; "oblige me by ordering my carriage. I shall return instantly to the hotel. I shall leave Paris to-morrow, for Italy."

He glanced furtively at her. He understood her meaning. He hastened to comply with her wish, and returned almost immediately to say that her carriage awaited her.

They descended the stairs together; they waited side by side for a short time in silence, until the vehicle was announced. The Marchioness entered it; he followed her. They rode home together alone, and still in silence.

By dawn, the Marquis was astir, and when the Marchioness made her appearance, the carriages, couriers, servants, etc., necessary for the journey, were ready for departure.



They proceeded by forced stages to Italy. They paused not until they reached Rome. Here they remained for some period, pursuing the same restless course of pleasure, and passing the same unsatisfactory kind of existence as in Paris.

The Marchioness never walked out alone—she always rode in a close carriage, unless when accompanied by the Marquis, which was seldom. She declined all invitations to parties, unless he would be sure to be present.

And yet, at a grand reception given by the Cardinal Minister, she found herself separated from the Marquis.

She took a seat near to the orangery, on which played fountains of cool water and fragrant scents. The coolness and the odor of the spot were grateful to her as a change from the heated apartments in which she had been moving.

She had not been seated an instant before she felt a warm breath play on her ear, and she heard a low voice say:

"It is useless to avoid me. You cannot escape me, for I love you, Constance. If it be a madness to do so, it is the madness of desperation. You have been mine, you are mine, you shall be mine until death. Say where I can meet you, and when, alone. Dare not refuse me, or I will pause at nothing to accomplish the resolution I have taken."

She turned her face upward; it almost touched that of the Earl of Brackleigh. A cold shiver went through her frame.

She rose up. She gazed at him steadfastly and firmly.

"I defy you!" she ejaculated, in low, emphatic tones.

Then, with the mien of a queen, she moved with slow and stately step from the place.

At a turn of the gilded saloon, she encountered the Marquis.

"My carriage," she said, in a drier, harsher tone than usual. "We quit Rome at day-break."

He looked at her with surprise. He glanced fiercely round the chamber, examining sharply every face within the range of his vision, but without discovering the one he sought.

The Marchioness swept on, and he was compelled hastily to follow.

On overtaking her, he said: "Whither do you propose proceeding to-morrow?"

"It is a matter of indifference to me," she returned, with a weary air; "to South America, if you will."

They proceeded to Florence. Two days after her arrival, the Marchioness observed from the window of the palace which the Marquis had engaged for their abode, the Earl of Brackleigh passing on horseback in the place below. He gazed up at the window at which she was seated, and proceeded slowly on.

Florence was quitted for Milan, Milan for Venice, and Venice for Naples. Thence to Turin, and back to Rome. From Rome to Paris, and back again to Rome.

And these changes were always made abruptly at the instance of the Marchioness. The Marquis never questioned their propriety.

He instantly acquiesced to the propositions of the Marchioness, and exerted himself to see that the preparations for departure from each place were rapidly and promptly made.

But, though he addressed no observations to her, he was satisfied with her conduct—gratified rather by it.

He could not fail to perceive that she was persecuted by the Earl of Brackleigh, and that she, with a wondrous firmness of resolution, avoided him, regardless of the inconveniences, the annoyance, and the fatigue it entailed upon her.

He tried his utmost to encounter the Earl in some public place, or alone, but in vain.

As if the Earl were conscious that he would make such an endeavor, he avoided a meeting with him, and successfully, too.

During this time, the Marquis practiced daily with the small-sword and with a pistol. He suffered no engagement to interfere with this practice; he acquired great proficiency with the sword, and he found ultimately few professors of fencing who could protect themselves completely from his attack, or who could hit him when on the defense, no matter how rapidly the passages were conducted.

But still, although his attempts were made with perseverance, shrewdness, and even cunning, he could not meet the Earl of Brackleigh face to face.

His position was an awkward one. The Marchioness had refused even to allude to her early connection with the Earl. She never even now mentioned his name; there was not an act of which the Earl was openly guilty that he was able to take notice of, so that he might promptly dispatch a friend to him, and thus compel him to meet him in a duel. He was forced, therefore, to comply with the successive requests of the Marchioness to change their locality without allusion to him, and to put up with the knowledge that his wife was pursued by a man for whom he personally entertained the most malignant sentiments, without having the power to stay him, or the opportunity of avenging the affront.

Thus passed away the three years of absence from England. The Marchioness resolutely adhered to her determination not to speak to the Earl, nor to grant him an interview. His threats she treated with scorn, and strangely enough, her defiance did not seem to precipitate him into any course which she dreaded more than that which he was pursuing, and which was wearing her life rapidly away.

Three years' incessant persecution had told seriously upon her. She was still fair, beautiful, majestic; but she was colorless as death, and her face was thin and sorrowful in its expression. She still affected high spirits—still spoke, when mixing among people of her own class, with a loud, laughing tone, and yet



moved with the same celerity as of old. But at moments, when those by whom she was surrounded could least expect it, she would become wholly abstracted, start when addressed, and indulge in a fresh burst of sprightliness which was too exaggerated to be genuine.

What were her moods when in the solitude of her own chamber, she alone knew.

Her maids were often certain, when they were summoned to her in the morning, that she had slept but little of the night, and had wept a great part of it away.

At last, seemingly worn out by incessant traveling, and driven into a corner, she elected to take a desperate course.

"The battle is inevitable," she communed with herself; "it must be fought, and it shall be fought out upon its own ground."

The Marquis received her determination to return to England with a species of savage glee. He, too, was heart-sick and weary of the state of things which he was enduring, and rejoiced at any opportunity which promised to end it.

Preparations were made for a swift return to Paris. A rest of two or three days there was arranged, and then for England—ho!

The programme was carried out, and the Marchioness of Westchester found herself once more occupying her suite of apartments in her London mansion.

Somehow, although the sight of these rooms revived very painful memories, yet she felt a sense of security and comfort in them which she had never once experienced since she had left England.

It is said that consumptives, when in their last days, have their bosoms filled with renewed hope, that they arrange plans for the future, as if they had years before them, and feed with an appetite which gives no sign that they are conscious that the shadow of death is upon them.

Constance felt a sense of comfort and security at the very moment that the events she had most seriously to apprehend were closing around her.

For some days after her return, she remained secluded in her own rooms, employed mostly in planning out a course for the future. She decided, after a long meditation, to place her whole history before her father, to bow to his judgment, and to rely upon his protection.

He would at least shield her from the fury of the Marquis, he would preserve her from the attacks of Bertram, and if she were compelled to withdraw from society and live for the remainder of her term in seclusion, it would be pleasanter and happier than her present state, for it would be free from anxiety, and secure from intrusion.

Her child! Did she not think of that? She did; and with strange feelings—strangely horrible feelings—she hoped to hear that it was dead.

She had not heard what had befallen to it since she quitted England. She had intrusted the management of it to Hagar Lot. She be-

lieved it to be still at the school at which Hagar had placed, and she presumed that when it quitted Blixenfinik Mansion, it would, as had been arranged, be made to believe that it was the child of shame, and would be sent abroad, where it could mix in society without its antecedents becoming known.

Yes, she unquestionably thought of it; and thought of it frequently. She dreamed of it—saw it in its tawdry dress, as she had with sickening horror beheld it at Ascot; but she thought of it only to wish that it had never been, or that it would die.

She thought, however, more of Bertram. She thought, indeed, only too often. His inflexible perseverance was having its natural effect.

It compelled her to think of him, and in thinking of him to remember.

Time softens anger. Time smooths down the rough points of wrongs. Time abates the causes of quarrel, and clears the path to reconciliation. Injuries looked at through a vista of years do not appear so formidable, or so unpardonable, as when they have just been committed. Reason, after a lapse of time, asserts a sway, and palliating circumstances present themselves, and ask to be considered, seldom without success.

When once more in England, the Marchioness began to think as Constance thought when a girl. She went over the incidents which had led to her separation from Bertram; and insensibly they began to assume a form of a very dangerous kind. She recalled her own proceedings, and she found that she had acted precipitately. She forgot how she had been urged to act as she had done. She forgot that she was governed by the high, proud spirit of a young, uncontrollable girl, and that she had been treated in a poor, mean, contemptible spirit by a man who ought to have been proud to have proclaimed to the world the treasure which was his. No; she unhappily began to make excuses for him, to see that he had had cause to complain—that she had deserted him, not he her. He had, indeed, obeyed her request—her demand—in consenting to leave her free and accept his own freedom; and she felt that he was justified now in approaching her and in addressing her as he had been of late doing.

He *was* her husband; neither his nor her subsequent marriage invalidated his right, at least, to speak with her.

It would be guiltiness for them to meet, or even to correspond, she knew that, and did not intend so do either; but she thought that it was her duty to think better of him than she had done.

He had so loved her when they first met, and when first they were married. He said that he loved her more deeply than ever now. If proof were wanted, surely it could be furnished in the persistency with which he had followed her from place for three long, dreary years; and in the tenderness for her reputation which he had displayed, by committing no act during the whole of that period which



should direct the attention of the world to him and to her.

Yes, she began to conceive that she had thought of him and treated him too harshly; and for whom—the Marquis!

A man with a cold, hard, proud, selfish nature, whom she had never loved, and for whom only too often she had felt emotions of unqualified hate.

She drew a comparison between the Earl and the Marquis—a most dangerous one for the latter—and for herself.

Then she began to wonder what Bertram could have to say to her, what he would be likely to propose to her, and what course she would be likely afterward to follow.

She sighed deeply. She could not grant him the interview, for the Marquis stood in her way.

The Marquis!

She shuddered! Then a cold, icy shiver stole slowly over her limbs, and she turned deadly pale.

What if the Marquis were to die?

She would be free—free to be united to Bertram—free to live a life of love and happiness with him—a delicious reward for all her past misery.

But the Marquis was healthy and strong, and not likely to die soon, unless—unless—

She covered her hands over her ears and bent her face down to her knees, for a voice whispered hissing in her ear:

“Three drops of that powder, dissolved in any warm liquid, and administered, will produce certain death on the seventh, fourteenth, or twenty-first day.”

And those words were repeated again and again in her ears, and passed through her brain incessantly, until she sprang from her chair and paced the room in agony and distress of mind.

While walking to and fro, with disordered step, her maid, Fane, entered the room with a letter upon a salver, and advanced to the Marchioness with it.

With an impatient gesture she took it from her, and without even glancing at the superscription, she tore it open.

She recognized the handwriting instantly. She glanced at the signature.

It was signed, “Bertram!”

With the train of thought which had been passing through her mind and still lingered there, it was as if a thunderbolt had been launched at her.

She peremptorily dismissed her maid and sank down upon the couch. For some time she struggled with her emotion, but for a long time without avail; at length she obtained the mastery, and became calm—horribly calm. Evil influences prevailed, and she turned her eyes upon the letter, and, quivering in every limb, commenced to read it.

Ay! to read Bertram's letter to her—his wife.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

“Who loves, raves—’tis youth's frenzy—but the cure  
Is bitterer still; as charm by charm unwinds  
Which robbed our idols, and we see too sure  
Nor worth nor beauty dwells from out the mind's  
Ideal shape of such; yet still it binds  
The fatal spell, and still it draws us on,  
Reaping the whirlwind from the oft-sown winds:  
The stubborn heart, its alchemy begun,  
Seems ever near the prize—wealthiest when most  
undone.” —BYRON.

Floret, in a whirl of excitement, attired herself quickly, with the intention of accompanying Lady Brackleigh to Brackleigh Mansion.

As she turned to leave her bed-room, her eye fell upon the little sleeping child intrusted to her charge.

Its moanings, indeed, attracted her attention, and as she gazed at it, she saw, by its flushed cheeks and restless movements, that it was in an incipient stage of some fever peculiar to childhood, and that it would, in all probability, be in a few hours very seriously ill.

She saw that it could not be left alone. Ida had set out for Regent street, and Mrs. Spencer had already departed to meet her on her return. What was therefore to be done?

To defer seeing the marriage-certificate of her mother would be indeed a grievous disappointment to her. She attached more value to the certainty of its existence than she did to her own life; and if she now missed the chance of beholding it, examining it, holding it, perhaps, in her hand, the opportunity might never occur to her again.

She looked at the child; it moved uneasily, with a piteous tone; its little brows were contracted, and its chest heaved and fell rapidly; it clutched with its small scarlet hands at the bed clothes; it was certainly attacked by a fever, but it still slept.

How long would it be ere it awoke? and if it awoke, with no one near it to tend it and assuage its pain, or moisten its parched lips, and to send instantly for advice, if needed, what might be the result?

Floret thought of its dead mother as she looked steadfastly at it; she thought of its father, fighting for his native land, far away in India; she thought much of its loneliness, of its being cast upon strangers for protection and kindness. She felt that she had only her to nurse it, to minister to its wants, to treat it with care and kindness, to take, indeed, the place of her who had been snatched away from it—to be to it that protector, guide, and gentle guardian, whom she had herself never known, whose care she had so much needed, and had so much missed.

Knowing, as she had known, the terrible consequences of being deserted by her parents, she felt that she could not now leave that poor, little, forlorn, sleeping child, grave as the results of staying by its side might be to herself.

So, with a heavy sigh, she took off her bonnet again, restored her shawl to its place, and



went back to the Countess, who was impatiently awaiting her.

The Countess looked surprised to find that she had made no change in her appearance, and somewhat impetuously demanded the reason.

Floret motioned to her to follow her, and conducted her to her sleeping-chamber. She pointed to the child.

"It is in my care," she said, in a low voice. "See its heated face, its burning hands; it is ill. I cannot leave it."

"Not to prove to yourself that no brand of shame lies upon your name, blackening its fair reputation?" observed the Countess, with emphasis.

"I cannot leave it," replied Floret, in a low, sad tone. "Some inward voice tells me that if I do, it will be forever."

"What," exclaimed the Countess, sharply and fretfully, as though she considered the condition of the child an insufficient argument for Floret's refusal to accompany her; "is the little creature a connection, a relative, a thing near and dear to you, that you should display such particular consideration for it?"

"It is motherless," returned Floret, in a decided tone. "It has only myself to rear and cherish it; if I leave it, I know of no one who would be so tender of its welfare as I am. I have suffered so much that I cannot submit this friendless, parentless child to the mercy of fate, even though in clinging to it I forego the first, nearest, dearest wish of my heart."

"It will not die," urged the Countess, impatiently. "Besides, there are surely others who can attend it as well as you, and who can obtain as readily medical assistance if it should need it."

"Those who could supply my place are away," responded Floret.

"But they will return again, probably, before the child wakes," persisted the Countess.

"Do not urge me," said Floret, firmly. "I cannot leave it."

"How long will it be ere those to whom you allude will be back here again?" inquired the Countess, perseveringly.

"An hour, perhaps," answered Floret.

"I will wait," said the Countess, with determination, and promptly seated herself.

Floret seated herself, too; and the Countess, with considerable tact, proceeded to put many questions to her respecting her past life, and elicited from her answers which went to prove that she certainly had not the slightest conception of the names of her parents.

While still in the midst of a searching cross-examination, the Countess was disturbed by the abrupt opening of the room-door, and the hurried entrance of Ida, who ran up to Floret, folded her arms about her neck, kissed her fondly, and laying her burning cheek to hers, she said:

"O darling, dear, dear Floret, I have had such a delightful walk, O, so delightful. I was quite timid in the great shop, and I am sure I shall not remember what that great black-

whiskered gentleman, who is at the head of the department—does not that sound grand—to which I contribute work, said. And I was quite timid when I started to come back alone; but I soon met with dear, good Mrs. Spencer, and shortly after that, by the very strangest chance in the world, we met with the Honorable Hyde Vaughan. Mrs. Spencer knows him, O, so well, and so he walked home with us, and Mrs. Spencer had to go shopping, and he walked part of the way with me alone. He is such a gentleman—such a perfect gentleman—not in conversation alone, but in spirit, in conception, in principle, and—O Floret! I do feel so happy. Do you know—"

At this moment her eye caught sight of the Countess of Brackleigh. She started from her position, and stood up trembling, and covered with confusion.

"I beg your pardon, madam," she said, in a faint tone. "I did not observe your presence."

The Countess eyed her curiously, and with a searching glance.

Then she returned to Floret, and said:

"Is this young lady the school-companion of whom you were speaking to me a few moments before she entered?"

"She is, Lady Brackleigh," returned Floret, looking at Ida with a re-assuring smile.

Poor Ida's face and neck wore a brilliant crimson, and Floret's peculiar smile did not help to reduce her color.

"You, too, are unacquainted with your parents?" said the Countess to her, abruptly.

Ida looked at her with amazement.

There seemed something harsh and unfeeling in the way she put the question.

The tears sprang thickly into her eyes, and she bent her head assentingly. She could not utter a word.

"My child, you have been deserted for some important reason," pursued the Countess, reflectively, as she gazed at her. "Parents do not discard their offspring unless under the pressure of some grave motive. Yet, not for one so secret that it cannot be discovered. You would, of course, be delighted to learn something of those by whom you have been deserted, and money and persevering diligence will, no doubt, unravel the mystery. You shall have the aid of both; but, in return for that promise, you must devote yourself to the attention of the little child in yonder bed-chamber, during the absence of your friend and companion, Floret, who is about to accompany me to my house for a short time. She may return to-night, or it may be to-morrow, or not for a day or two beyond. That will depend upon circumstances which at the present moment I have not under control."

Ida's face blanched. She caught Floret by the hands.

"You are not about to desert me, Floret?" she exclaimed, anxiously.

"No, indeed, Ida," replied Floret, quickly. "I shall be away from you, I hope—I believe



—for a few hours only, and I anticipate that you will find me, upon my return, happier than you have ever known me to be.”

“Then, pray—pray go! do not heed me!” rejoined Ida, eagerly. “I shall be happier even than I am now to know that the load of care, which has so long rested upon your mind, has been removed. Go, dear Edith—I mean Floret. Ah! I shall never learn to call you by any other name than that by which I first knew you. Go! but do not be longer absent than you can avoid!”

“Edith!” repeated the Countess, with some little earnestness. Then, addressing Floret, she said: “Have you ever borne the name of Edith?”

“It was the name by which I was known only at the school in Yorkshire,” returned Floret. “It was a name given to me by the agent of whom I have already spoken to your ladyship; but I believe it was used only for the purpose of concealment. I had not borne it before, nor have I since.”

“Let me see,” muttered the Countess, speaking to herself. “Constance Ada Edith—aha! it is so—my memory is not, I am sure, treacherous! That name, you say,” she subjoined, addressing Floret, “was borne by you at the Yorkshire school, and tendered as yours to the mistresses of the establishment by the agent of—of—by the person, I mean, whom you have mentioned to me?”

Floret replied in the affirmative.

The Countess mused for a moment.

“It is worth the trial,” she muttered. “It shall be attempted!”

Again addressing Floret, but in a milder and pleasanter tone, she said:

“I await you, child. As soon as you are ready, we will depart.”

Floret retired to her bedchamber, and once more donned her walking attire. Ida, who had followed her thither, received from her the instructions she had to give respecting the little Indian girl; but had no time to relate the particulars of the adventures which had befallen herself, although every little incident crowded to her lips, and yearned to pop out. They embraced each other tenderly, and Floret cast her eyes around the apartment, as if to take a last survey of it.

A kind of presentiment stole over her mind, to the effect that she was looking her last upon it, and she bade a mental farewell to an abode in which she had been as happy, if not happier, than in any other so long as she could remember.

The Countess had informed Lord Victor that she should be happy of his escort home; but she did not enter the room in which he and Hyde Vaughan were seated, closeted with Mrs. Spencer, drawing out of that excellent old lady every information which she possessed respecting Floret and Ida. She descended the stairs with swift steps, and was out in the street before Floret could remind her that Lord Victor was awaiting her in Mrs. Spencer's room.

A cab was passing; the Countess hailed it, and bade the driver conduct them to Brackleigh Mansion, Grosvenor gate. She made Floret enter before her, and hastily followed her.

They were not long in reaching the residence of the Countess.

On alighting, she entered the spacious hall. A number of servants were congregated there, and were going through the laborious process of making bets upon some sporting event, and Nat Ferret was among them, advising them to back certain horses which were sure to win the races for which they were entered, although he was so weak and foolish as to lay long odds against them. But there, as he said, cheerfully, he did not mind losing a pound or two, and he laid the odds just to oblige them.

On the entrance of the Countess and Floret, the men all arranged themselves, hurriedly, in a line, Nat Ferret standing at the foot of the staircase.

As they reached him, an involuntary exclamation burst from his lips. The Countess looked quickly and suddenly at him. She saw that his eyes were fastened upon Floret's face.

She bent her head swiftly close to her, and, in low, but rapid accents, said:

“Let fall your vail, my dear child.”

Floret obeyed her, and they passed up the magnificent stone staircase, which ascended to the top of the building, until they reached the corridor which led to the Countess's suite of rooms. The latter then took Floret by the hand, and conducted her to her private sitting-room—her boudoir—into which no one but herself was allowed to enter, save the Earl, who very, very rarely invaded its sanctity, and the Countess's favorite maid, Subtle.

The Countess, with a display of urbanity and attention which Floret felt was shown to her in order that she might not feel uncomfortable while there, and, longing to get away, try to do so, bade her remove her walking habiliments, and divest herself of all restraint. She entreated her, also, to make herself quite as much at ease as if she were in her own apartments in Piccadilly.

She observed that Floret was much struck by the magnificence of the adornment, and the luxurious furnishing of the room, and she noticed that a proud expression passed over her features. She saw, too, that she drew herself up, and that she stepped in that splendidly-decorated apartment with a demeanor which she had seen no other woman display, except the Marchioness of Westchester.

“Do you like this apartment?” inquired the Countess, eyeing her attentively.

“It is superb!” was the reply, as Floret looked admiringly about her.

The Countess sighed.

“This magnificence alone does not bring happiness,” she said.

“No,” faltered Floret, dropping her eyes upon the carpet.

And she thought, what to her would be a place so gorgeous as this, if she had not a fair,



unstained name to wear when surrounded by such splendor?

"It might have added to mine," observed the Countess, thoughtfully. "I thought it would. When even as young as you are, I was living in a style not less magnificent than this, I imagined that I had but to add a title to my name to win a life of unparalleled happiness. I secured the title, and with it bought a life's misery. But we shall talk over these sad events soon enough. I am interested in your fate, Floret—deeply interested. At first I fully intended to include you in my great revenge; but your gentleness, your rectitude of principle, your modest estimate of yourself, your just appreciation of the position in which those who should have ennobled you have placed you, have enlisted my strong sympathies for you, the more particularly when I remember the sphere in which you should have moved. I know the condition into which you have been thrust, and the wretchedness you have been compelled to endure. There is a goal which you must strive to win, or pine in obscurity, and, perhaps, die in want. To reach this goal, you must pause at nothing which shall conduct you to it, save such acts as would bring a blush to your cheek, or leave a pang upon your memory. I am desirous of guiding you on your path, of advising and directing you. I wish you to be led by me, entertaining, at the same time, the conviction that I will neither suggest nor advise you to take any step derogatory to your honor, or opposed to your sense of what is right. Will you, with this understanding, consent to surrender your judgment to me, and do as I shall recommend you?"

"I am willing to do anything which is not blamable to become mistress of the facts of which you have promised to give me proofs," returned Floret, without hesitation.

"Enough," answered the Countess, laconically.

She rang her bell sharply. Almost instantly, it was answered by her maid, Subtle.

The Countess beckoned to her as she appeared at the door, and, pointing to Floret, she said:

"Assist that young lady to remove her bonnet and shawl."

At the same time, with an impatient haste, she tore rather than took off her own.

While thus engaged, she watched the face of her maid, Subtle, attentively.

As Floret lifted up her veil and removed her bonnet, she saw that the eyes of Subtle expanded, and she heard a faint exclamation of surprise burst from her lips.

She made no remark until Floret's shawl was removed, and she stood in her plain yet neat and elegant robe, which she wore in her secluded apartments at Pimlico.

Subtle's behavior was a pattern of discretion and civility. It was very evident to the marchioness that she was utterly amazed, and could not keep her eyes from Floret's face. Yet she moved about and busied herself, and

seemed so occupied with matters which, though trifles, were very conducive to personal comfort, that Floret did not for an instant imagine that she was taking more notice of her than she would of any ordinary guest of her ladyship's.

Presently the Countess said to Floret:

"Do you remember my maid, Subtle, Floret?"

Floret was surprised at the question, but it flashed through her mind that when ill there, some few years previously, that a young woman assisted Susan Atten to wait upon her.

She looked at Subtle, but she did not recognize the face. She thought, however, that it was possible that she had seen her in that house before, but she did not remember her. To elicit this acknowledgment was not, however, the purpose of the Countess' question. She wished to draw from Subtle an unsolicited recognition of Floret, and she obtained it.

"Is this lady the same person as the young child who was attacked by the scarlet fever when your ladyship brought her from some place where your ladyship had discovered her?" said Subtle, quickly; and added, "Your ladyship will pardon me, I know, if I do not express myself properly, but I now remember the young lady's face. I thought that it was quite familiar to me, but I could not remember where I had seen it before."

"Not even in a miniature?" inquired the Countess, meaningly.

Subtle made a slight gesture with her hands.

"To be sure, my lady, of course, that is where I have seen the face!" she exclaimed. "Your ladyship means that miniature of the Marchioness—"

"Yes, yes," interposed the Countess, quickly. "You remember how that young lady wore her hair?"

"Perfectly, my lady," answered Subtle.

"And the style of dress?" continued the Countess.

"Oh, yes, my lady! I remember it very well," replied her maid.

"Do you think you could attire this young lady so as to resemble that portrait?" interrogated the Countess.

"Certainly, my lady, as closely as possible," she answered.

"How long would it occupy to alter a dress—make a new one—in fact, to render her the counterpart of the miniature of which I have spoken?" asked the Countess, and added, "I mean the shortest time possible."

"Two days, my lady, if I alone do the work," answered Subtle; "but if several hands are employed, not a day would be required."

"That will do," said the Countess. She dismissed her maid; and when the latter quitted the room, she turned to Floret, and said to her:

"I have a plan in my head by which I think I can materially shorten the term of your continuance as one unknown and nameless; and to accomplish it I wish you to dress



in a manner I shall prescribe. It is a style of attire which will be very becoming to you. I assure you that you might be mistaken for a princess in the garb I suggest that you should wear."

A faint blush spread itself over Floret's face. She remembered how much she had once longed to appear as a princess—"a foreign princess"—and what result had attended that wish.

"I can carry out my schemes without it," continued the Countess, observing the slight confusion which she betrayed, "though not so well. I see no harm in your attiring yourself so as to resemble a picture; but if you think it objectionable, it shall not be done."

"Anything to win for me the right to a name," said Floret, with clasped hands.

"It will be requisite that you should remain here for two days or more," subjoined the Countess, quickly. "No wicked designs against your peace or comfort can reach you here. You shall have one of my own rooms, which no person in this mansion will dare to approach without my permission; and the short delay will give me the opportunity of gathering together all the documents necessary to enlighten you respecting your origin. Years have elapsed since they were in my possession; and they have been hidden away in obscure places, so secret, indeed, that it will require some effort of the memory to remember where I have placed them. You can pen a few lines to your friend at Pimlico, to set her mind at ease, and before a week shall elapse, you shall not only know all, but have in your possession the proofs of every statement which shall have been made to you."

Floret assented; for the thought crossed her that it would be worth any risk to be able to meet Lord Victor on equal terms.

He had been a star shining in her eyes for years; but he had appeared to be so far off, that she believed that nothing but her deep and earnest wishes for his happiness could ever reach him.

The promises of the Countess altered that impression, and her heart yearned for their consummation.

Two days elapsed. She remained a prisoner the whole time in the rooms which had been set apart for her, and she had only her own company, and that of an ample supply of books, to solace her. Yet those days somehow went quickly, for hope was in her heart now, and she looked forward to a time which Hagar Lot's revelation had previously shut out of her vision altogether.

On the morning of the third day, she awoke and found the Countess's maid, Subtle, at her bed-side. Although the latter had previously waited upon her exclusively, she had not as yet paid her such attention as this: indeed, Floret had not wished it, and had requested her to spare herself as much trouble as she could.

The mystery was, however, soon explained. Floret saw in Subtle's hand a rich, pale-blue

silk dress, upon which were embroidered a small group of flowers. It was a costly dress, and looked very beautiful.

"It is the wish of the Countess, if you please, Miss, that you should wear this robe when you dress to-day," said Subtle, with a smile of triumph upon her countenance; "it is such a charming dress, and it will become you so much."

Floret could not help feeling a flutter at the heart. She knew the hour had arrived in which she was to play a part. Before whom, with what purpose, or what result, she could only form a very vague guess.

She rose, breakfasted, and then gave herself up to Subtle to be attired. The woman took great pains with her hair, making very commendatory remarks upon its beauty and its quantity. At last, having arranged it, she placed a simple flower in it, and it was completed quite to her satisfaction, as she did not hesitate to make known.

Then followed the donning of the dress, the setting-it off to the best advantage, the alterations, the additions, and those little performances which take so much time, but which, of course, meet with so ample a reward in the admiration they assist to excite.

Floret at last was attired, and surveyed herself in a cheval glass. She was startled by her own appearance.

She was by no means vain; but she had a very keen perception of the beautiful. Indeed, the figure she beheld in the glass she considered to be so unlike her own, that for the moment she believed that a stranger had entered the room, and she turned her head sharply round; the maid, Subtle, however, was alone with her.

Then she looked again in the glass, at first timidly, then delightedly, and ultimately proudly.

"At least," she thought, "those with whom I am connected by birth cannot be ashamed of me."

She looked again. Her fair hair was so tastefully arranged, the dress was so beautiful in itself, and fitted her form so exactly, that it was not possible to avoid admiring herself more than she had ever done before.

Why this, indeed, was being dressed like a princess. If, when attired in her blue, star-spotted dress, and her wreath of stained muslin flowers, she thought it possible to charm the heart of a young lord, it was not surprising that a wish should rise up in her mind that Lord Victor could see her now.

Perhaps, as he was on such friendly terms with the Countess, she had arranged that he should see how a poor girl should look when finely attired. It was but a fancy, but it was one which she had a latent hope would prove true.

She scarcely listened to the remarks of Subtle, her mind was so occupied with the wish to know what would be Lord Victor's thoughts of her when he saw her thus dressed, and, with a quiet, gratified smile upon her beautiful face,



she announced herself ready to be conducted to the contest, before Subtle had finished her expressions of admiration, and her assertion that she was as like "the" miniature as twins were like each other.

The Countess of Brackleigh was perusing a letter when she entered. The rustle of her silk dress caused the Countess to raise her eyes, and she uttered instantly an ejaculation of wonder, and it seemed fear; for she sprang to her feet as though a phantom had glided into her apartment, and revealed itself before her.

Floret's salutation, however, instantly restored her to her composure, and, placing her hand to her temple, she said:

"I scarcely knew you when you entered, your attire has so changed you. Pardon my excitement, my nerves have been shattered, and I fear they will never recover their original firmness. Be seated; I wish to speak with you."

Floret obeyed.

The Countess having made a warm eulogy upon her appearance, then added:

"I heard your young companion, who resides with you at Pimlico, call you Edith—a name by which you were known at school. Have you any objection to be addressed by that name while staying beneath this roof?"

"None whatever," returned Floret. "I dislike the name simply because it was associated with so much that was painful and humiliating to me, but I have no objection to assume it again if you wish me to do so."

"I do," replied the Countess, quickly, "and with it another name."

Floret looked at her questioningly.

"What name?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"It will be needful that you should be known by a surname as well as a Christian name," observed the Countess, in a low tone. "It will not do for the servants here to speak of you as Miss Edith only. Do you understand me, Floret?"

"I—I—do," returned Floret, with embarrassment; a crimson flush spread itself over her face and neck, and she bent her eyes to the ground.

Her fine dress seemed to her to be a mockery now.

The Countess observed her emotion, although she strove to suppress it.

"Do not misunderstand me, my dear child," she added, hastily. "I will be as tender of your feelings as I can possibly, but there are some questions which we must settle, and this is one. Have you heard of the name of Plantagenet?" she inquired, looking steadfastly at her.

Floret raised her eyes with a wondering look.

"In English history, certainly," she replied.

"But have you heard it, or do you know it as belonging to any one—a commoner—of the

present day?" inquired the Countess, still scrutinizing her features closely.

Floret shook her head.

"I have not," she replied, with some decision:

The Countess appeared satisfied.

"How would that name suit you?" she observed. "Miss Edith Plantagenet sounds well."

"To one who, like myself, has no name," responded Floret, again drooping her head, "it matters little what name is chosen me for adoption."

The Countess smiled strangely.

"In this case," she thought, "it will matter much," but she did not say so.

She only said, in a slightly careless tone:

"I am going out on some rather important business this morning, I shall be compelled to leave you again alone; but this morning you will have the free run of my suite of rooms. There is one at the end which adjoins the library; I should advise you to select that in which to pass your time; you will find much within it to amuse you. On my return, I shall be able to show you, I quite anticipate, a marriage-certificate in which you will see your real name set down."

As she concluded, she rose up and quitted the room, without uttering another word.

Floret thought her conduct rather strange, and she began to find her situation in this singular mansion, so superbly furnished, and so dull and silent as it was, irksome.

She quietly resolved that if the Countess failed that day to keep her promises, that she would stay no longer within it, but return to her quiet home and her old resolution to live alone somewhere, unnoticed and unknown.

While pursuing this train of thought, she wandered slowly to the room to which the Countess had directed her. She found it full of articles of *virtu*, books, paintings, statuary, portfolios of engravings—it is impossible to enumerate what was to be there met with.

With pleasure at finding such a store of amusement, she closed the door and seated herself by the side of a portfolio of engravings.

While deeply engaged in looking over them she heard some one enter the room.

She looked up and saw a pale, handsome, aristocratic-looking gentleman enter with a slow step, and a thoughtful expression upon his face.

It was clear that he did not perceive her as he advanced into the room, and she, therefore rose up to receive him.

A strong light fell upon her face and the upper part of her dress, and displayed both to great advantage.

He heard the rustle of her dress as she moved, and he turned his eyes upon her.

He instantly staggered back several steps, he caught at a chair to support him, his face became a livid white, he gasped for breath; at length, with a groan, he cried:

"My God! Constance!"



## CHAPTER XXVII.

"And ne'er did Grecian chisel trace  
A Nymph, a Naiad, or a Grace  
Of finer form or lovelier face.

What, though no rule of courtly grace  
To measured mood had train'd her pace,  
A foot more light, a step more true,  
Near from the heath-flower dash'd the dew.

She paused, and on the stranger gazed;  
Not his the form, nor his the eye  
That youthful maidens wont to fly,"

—SCOTT.

Floret, as soon as she had fairly an opportunity of seeing the face and form of the Earl, guessed who it was that stood before her.

His finely-formed features, delicate complexion, and patrician mien enabled her to readily recognize him, although she did not remember to have seen him before; and there was no one at hand to present him to her by name.

She had heard his name mentioned, but only incidentally, by the Countess, and then in such a tone and in such terms as to make her comprehend that they were not living together on amicable terms.

It had not, although it was not unnatural that it should do so, occurred to her that it was probable she would encounter him during her stay in his princely mansion; she was, therefore, quite unprepared for the interview, and at a loss what reason to give to him, should he ask her what was the object of her visit to Brackleigh House.

She rose from her seat in some embarrassment; and her confusion was not lessened by his singular exclamation, and his very palpable excitement; nor was her composure in any degree restored when, advancing hastily, he gazed with unqualified amazement in her face.

She perceived that his steadfast examination of her features proceeded neither from simple curiosity, nor from mere admiration of her beauty; but that it was rather the consequence of an impression that he had beheld her countenance on a previous occasion, and in some other place.

She ran her eye over his features, too. She could not help doing it. They were certainly not familiar to her; yet, strangely enough, she had a vague notion that she had seen them before, though she had not the faintest idea where.

This fancy was not calculated to reassure her; because she reflected, that if ever they had met before, it must have been when she was with Daddy Windy; and if he recognized her from having seen her on some such occasion as Ascot Races, his astonishment at seeing her, dressed as she then was, and occupying the position of a guest at his residence, was extremely natural.

Another reflection, following with equal rapidity, induced her to think that she was wrong in her supposition. The name of Constance had fallen from his lips as though it belonged to her. Now, she had never heard any one call her by it, or intimate that she had any claim to it; and therefore the proper inference for her

to draw was, that he mistook her for some other person, whose presence in his mansion gave him just grounds for amazement.

That she felt any emotion, or had any particle of what is termed natural instinct to tell her that the man who confronted her was her father, we are not prepared to assert. The organization of woman is always fine, and susceptible to external impressions more quickly and more keenly than that of man; but it would be something too much to say that Floret felt any inward promptings that she was standing in the presence of a parent, although nothing had transpired to lead her to conceive that he was other than a perfect stranger to her.

She felt perturbed, and trembled, because she knew—at least believed—herself to be standing in the presence of an Earl, without having, should he question her upon the point, any explanation to offer for being there; save that she was invited to the house by the Countess, in order that she might inspect a document relative to her birth.

This was an explanation which, if she tendered him, she felt would place her in an awkward predicament, and would lead to a series of interrogatories that could not be otherwise than painful to her; and she now wished that she had not been quite so hasty in accepting the invitation of the Countess, or that, on finding the certificate, which she had come there specially to see, was not forthcoming, she had returned to Pimlico.

It was too late now; the Earl was before her, and was looking upon her with an air of mystified bewilderment, which seemed to increase the more he gazed upon her.

Unable to endure his eager, searching inspection of her features, she dropped her eyes upon the carpet, and remained silent and motionless.

At length, drawing a deep breath, he exclaimed, in an undertone:

"I am amazed, confounded, perplexed beyond expression. It is no phantom I see before me. Yet—What, in the name of Heaven, does it—can it—mean? Who—what are you? Why are you here? Speak!"

She raised her eyes to his; a strange thrill ran through her veins as she met a look, so piercing it seemed as though it would penetrate to the recesses of her brain, and read there her most latent thoughts.

She did not know what to reply. She was not prepared to utter an untruth; she was loth to state the truth; she felt embarrassed and distressed; and she sought refuge in silence.

He repeated his questions yet more earnestly.

"Pardon me," he added; "it is no common inquisitiveness which induces me thus to question you; but it is for reasons which are even more startling to myself than they, perhaps, would be to you, if I were to communicate them."

Floret still remained silent. Her pride revolted at the idea of acknowledging herself to



be something meaner than a merely obscure individual; and yet she scorned to even intimate that which was not true. She had no alternative but silence.

"I assume that you are upon a visit to the Countess, my dear young lady," he continued, in soft, mellow tones; "but I have the misfortune not to have been informed of the pleasure you are conferring upon the Countess, and, I hope, myself. I am ignorant, therefore, of the title of the lady in whose presence I have the honor to be. As there is no one by to formally introduce us, permit me to inform you that I am the Earl of Brackleigh, and to hope that you will repose a similar confidence in me."

He paused, and awaited her answer.

Twice or thrice she essayed to speak; but the words would not come forth. She remembered the injunction of the Countess to use a name which was strange to her, and to which she believed that she had no title; but she did not like to say that her name was Floret, and no other with which she was acquainted.

The Earl was evidently surprised and disconcerted by her continued silence—it added to the mystery which surrounded her, and he said, at length, gravely, but somewhat impatiently:

"In plain language, Madam, I request you to favor me with your name?"

Floret's pride was set in motion by his sudden cold and haughty tone. A crimson flush suffused her forehead and cheeks.

"My name is Edith," she said, with a voice and bearing as haughty as his own.

He started at the sound of her voice, and, laying his finger gently upon her wrist, he said, rapidly:

"Yes, Edith—Edith what?"

"Plantagenet!" she said, without pausing to reflect—said it with a peculiar curl of scorn moving her upper lip.

He uttered a cry, staggered back, and sank upon a seat.

He pressed her hand upon his temples, and gazed wildly upon her.

A string of frenzied thoughts rushed through his brain.

"Almighty heaven!" he ejaculated; "the name, the extraordinary resemblance, cannot be a mere accident! That is impossible; but yet, who can this girl be?"

"Tell me," he exclaimed, in a voice which trembled in every accent; "are you of the Plantagenets of—of Hyde Park—of Dorsetshire—Wiltshire—I mean of the family of Pierrepont Plantagenet, of Plantagenet House? Speak, I conjure you!"

"I—I—do not—do not know!" she answered, with a faltering tongue, and shrinking back in confusion.

"Do not know!" he repeated, with amazement. "Surely, you must know from whom you have sprung! You must be of the family I have named. Your resemblance to—"

"The Marchioness of Westchester, *nec* Constance Plantagenet, is remarkable—is it not,

Brackleigh?" exclaimed a voice close to them. They both turned sharply in the direction of the speaker.

The Countess of Brackleigh stood within a few feet of them.

She had entered the room unperceived. She had, no doubt, placed herself in some part of the room where she could not be seen by those within it, and she emerged from it at what she supposed to be an opportune moment.

She was, however, premature. The Earl glanced at her face. He saw upon it an expression of malicious triumph and vindictive bitterness. He took alarm—his guilty conscience was ever ready with unpleasant suggestions—he instantly became frigid in his demeanor, and replied, with assumed calmness:

"Yes, Lady Brackleigh, this young lady does resemble the Marchioness—at least, so far as my memory serves me; it is so very long since I saw her—"

"A week or ten days at the very least, Brackleigh," interposed the Countess, with a curling lip.

"Possibly," he returned, playing with his moustache; "it fatigues one's memory to go back to a longer distance of time."

"Still your lordship perceives the great resemblance between this young lady and the Marchioness of Westchester?" urged the Countess.

"The Marchioness of Westchester!" repeated Floret, mentally, a dozen times. "I shall not forget that name."

"I do perceive a likeness, certainly," returned the Earl, coldly; "but I do not think there is anything extremely marvelous in such a coincidence. The young lady has informed me that she is a Plantagenet, which would account for the resemblance. That fact will, I presume, account for her presence here. She is a *protegee* of your ladyship's, I can easily guess."

"Why, my Lord?" inquired the Countess, drily.

"Oh, you have for years possessed an extraordinary infatuation with regard to that family," he returned, with an attempt at sarcasm. "Had our sexes been reversed, I should have been extremely jealous of the Marchioness of Westchester, your ladyship has displayed for such a lengthened period so great an interest in every matter with which the Marchioness is connected—I might say an undying interest."

Your lordship may say with perfect truth an undying interest," rejoined the Countess, emphatically, "an interest which will not flag nor terminate until, at least, poetical justice has been done."

"I do not understand you," said the Earl, looking her in the face with a penetrating gaze.

"You will," she responded.

The Earl laughed sarcastically, and affecting an air of indifference, although he felt by no means easy under the allusion, said:



"I trust your ladyship will permit me to doubt. I have tried to understand you so long without success, that I am afraid I must give it up in despair."

"My lord, the time for me to speak so plainly that there shall not be the possibility of a misunderstanding between us has not yet arrived," she rejoined; "but the time is not far distant. Until it does come, I must content myself with allusions, and your lordship must be satisfied to cast about for their meaning."

"Really, your ladyship has played the part of the Sphinx so long, that it has—you must excuse me—become wearisome," interposed the Earl. "I hate riddles; I always did. I do not object to facts; but they must be facts. When your ladyship condescends to speak so very plainly as you have intimated that you will do, I assume that every assertion will be supported by facts—I shall be prepared to meet them; but until then do not worry me and yourself by dark hints and mysterious insinuations. They appear to disturb you, and they only incite me—"

"What, my lord?" she cried, fiercely, as he paused.

"My pity and a smile," he replied, turning away to quit the apartment.

With a sudden stamp of the foot, and a gesture of extreme anger, she compelled him to turn and look at her.

He saw that her face was as white as marble, that her eyes were glazing at him between her expanded lids, and that they were as bright as stars. She pointed at Floret, who, overcome with excitement, wonder, mystification, stood shrinking by a table, and said, hoarsely:

"Look well upon this face, my lord—this young, pale face—the face of one who has passed through vicissitudes, misery, poverty, wretchedness, and persecution, I might justly say unexampled. Look well at it; think of it, dream of it—think and dream with it of December the fifth, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-two, passed by you in Brighton. You cannot forget how. Let me add that this young creature, upon whom you are gazing, was born at Beachborough, in Kent, toward the close of the year eighteen hundred and thirty-three. Now, my lord, pity, me still, if you will, and smile—if you can."

She seized Floret by the wrist, and literally dragged her into an inner chamber, closing the door behind her, and locking it upon the inside.

The Earl of Brackleigh did not attempt to follow her; he remained transfixed to the spot. He was as cold as ice, and seemed to be changed into stone.

He had obeyed her directions to look well at Floret's face, and in doing so, he was struck more forcibly than ever with her remarkable resemblance to Constance Plantagenet as he knew her, a young, lovely girl, just escaping from childhood; and while this conviction was settling itself in his mind, he heard that memorable date, which, whatever else had gone, had never faded from his memory.

"The fifth of December, eighteen hundred and thirty-two!"

"This young creature upon whom you are gazing was born at Beachborough, in Kent, toward the close of the year eighteen hundred and thirty-three!"

While these words were passing like fiery particles, through his brain, he remembered that Constance was down at Beachborough in the first year of their secret marriage, and that while there she was very ill.

That memory was startlingly suggestive.

At the same time, out of the storehouse of his memory, came the remembrance of the child at Ascot—the child, too, whom his wife, afterward had for a time adopted, and who had been ill of a fever in that very house. Were they and the young girl he had just seen one and the same person?

And if so, was she—could she be a daughter of Constance, his wife, and therefore his child, too?

His heart almost ceased to beat, he felt as though his emotion would suffocate him. All his life he had an ambition to have a child. If he had known that Constance had been delivered at Beachborough of a child in secret, no earthly consideration would have withheld him from proclaiming their marriage to the world. His latent passion for Constance wanted but that spark to have set it in a blaze, and to have kept it burning brightly.

Something to love and to cherish, which should prove equally a tie to draw both closer together, was all that he needed to have made him twine his arms about his true wife, and defy Fate itself to part them.

Alas! for both, their connection being clandestine, they met only seldom, and in secret; both acted in public as though they were scarcely acquainted, and many temptations to which the then viscount, being a young and handsome man, was subjected, made him imagine that an affection which circumstances had but rendered dormant had glided into indifference.

All was changed now. His love had come back upon him. Years had but rendered it more ardent, and he was still engaged in the endeavor to obtain with Constance a secret and lengthened interview. He had no doubt, if he succeeded, that he should prevail upon her to fly with him to some region far away from England, where, unknown, they could live in security and happiness upon that love which they had both so heedlessly cast away when they might have enjoyed it, not only with felicity, but with honor.

He had refrained for the last two years from attempting to meet her in public, and appearing there to annoy her. He had no desire, for her sake, to set the tongue of scandal in action, and he did not wish to provoke a hostile meeting with the Marquis. He knew that the latter, from some cause or other, suspected him of having an illicit attachment for the Marchioness, and was ever ready whenever they encountered each other, as rare as the



occasions were, to fasten a quarrel upon him; but he avoided giving him the opportunity, for he had a presentiment that if they did ever have a meeting, it would be a deadly one. He could answer at least for his own fixed resolve upon that point.

To add to the intensity of his feeling upon the matter, there now came the startling suggestion that he was the father of a grown-up child, and that he had a few minutes previously seen her for the first time.

The more he reflected, and thoughts rushed like lightning through his brain, the more certain he became that Floret was his child. Her age, the place of her birth, her name, and, above all, her remarkable resemblance to Constance, assured him that it must be so.

If so, where had she been since her birth?—in whose hands?—how brought up?

He turned faint and cold. The Countess had spoken of vicissitudes, misery, poverty, wretchedness, and persecution. What might that comprehend?

His pride took fright. She was, if his child, and he had scarcely a doubt of it, the daughter of an earl, and had been—Heaven alone knew what.

How sick at heart he felt.

He thought of the beggar-child at Ascot Races, with a wreath round her head, and selling flowers.

His child!

The child of Constance, by her present title Marchioness of Westchester, by her right Countess of Brackleigh, selling flowers, a child-beggar, upon a race-course.

The thought was maddening to him. What could he do if it were to be proved to him that Floret was his child? Could he recognize her, though his heart would yearn, leap, to press her to his bosom and call her his own darling?

Yet, if Constance had become a mother while staying at Beachborough, what was her motive for concealing from him the fact that she had had a child?

There was something so strange and mysterious in this, that he could not find a solution for it; but he determined to obtain one. He resolved to bring matters to a crisis, for the time had evidently come now.

The Countess—how, he could not surmise—evidently knew all, for she had so significantly, after mentioning the date of his marriage with Constance, requested his pity. He had no doubt that she had some scheme on foot which, if he suffered her to bring to maturity, might secure to her some great revenge and ruin him. Not only ruin him, but might so compromise Constance as to figuratively destroy her; it must, therefore, it was evident, be his first task to forestall her plans, by taking prompt action himself.

That action must be, at every hazard, to obtain an interview with Constance. It was a difficult task, for she appeared to be ever on the alert to discover his arrangements to secure an interview with her and to defeat them. His

motives, however, both for her sake and his own, were so strong, that risks he had previously declined to incur he now determined to hazard; and with this intention he hastened to his study.

He rang a bell for Nat, who appeared very promptly, and with a peculiar smirk upon his face.

Before the Earl could speak, Nat exclaimed, with a knowing wink:

"It's all right this time, my Lord!"

"What is all right?" he asked, sternly.

"Me an' that party, my Lord!" returned Nat, with a wink of the eye.

"I am in no humor for any foolery!" exclaimed the Earl, sharply. "I have some particular instructions to give you, and you will, therefore, be wise if you keep a silent tongue, and listen to me very attentively."

"I axes your pardon, my Lord," returned Nat, with a determined air, but yet with a persistency that would not be denied, although he perceived that the Earl was in no mood to be trifled with; "but I've just seen that party."

"What party, fool?" cried the Earl, impatiently.

"Vy, my Lord, Fane, the Marchioness's waiting-maid," returned Nat.

"Ha!" cried the Earl, quickly; "what did she say?"

"Vy, my Lord, ve met permiskus, as I might say," answered Nat, rubbing his chin with his right hand. "Az' a thought struck me, vich I acted on. I had a party vith dark ringlets in my hi' as the fust Mrs. Ferret, but she didn't wait for me, but married a slaughterman, doin', I believe, a good stroke o' business, vich I took rayther to 'art, because I vos deeply moved vith them ringlets, and a scream—in—"

"What the devil is all this rubbish to me?" cried the Earl, eagerly.

"Only jest then," rejoined Nat, hastily, for he saw danger in the sparkling of the Earl's eyes, "that when I saw Fane to-day, I sez to myself, 'I'll make her an offer to be Mrs. Ferret number one, an' if she consents to my proposition, vy she'll jest tell me how my Lord can drop upon the Marchioness when she can't give 'im the slip.'"

"Capital!" cried the Earl, hastily; "you proposed, and she accepted you?"

"Yes, my Lord," replied Nat, rubbing his hands; "and—"

"The Marchioness! tell me only of her!" he cried, eagerly.

"Vanders of a hevenin' up an' down down the flower-garding and shady walks at the back of Westchester House, vich 'ere is the key on it," said Nat, holding up a small bright latch-key.

The Earl snatched it from him.

"About what time?" he inquired.

"Atween eight and nine, my Lord, in the dux of the hevenin'," he answered.

The clock was tolling the hour of nine, and the Earl, muffled in a cloak, stood in the sha-



dow of a thick herbaceous tree in the gardens of Westchester House, silent and motionless.

He had been in the same spot just one hour without hearing a leaf fall, but his patience was at length rewarded by the sound of a light and stealthy step moving toward him.

As it reached the spot where he was standing, he moved a pace forward, and discovered the form of a woman before him, though she, too, was shrouded by a cloak.

He clutched at her hand, and caught her by the wrist; the hood of her cloak fell from her head, and disclosed the features of Hagar Lot.

She gazed upon her detainer with gleaming eyes, which seemed to flash with fire, and in low, but clear, distinct, and bitter tones, she exclaimed:

"So, my Lord, as the day of reckoning surely comes to us all, we meet at last."

The Earl staggered back a step; a groan escaped his lips, and he would have fled, but that, in her turn, she caught him by the wrist and detained him.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Let me wring your heart; for so shall,  
If it be made of penetrable stuff;  
If damned custom have not braz'd it so,  
That it is proof and bulwark against sense."  
"What have I done, that thou dar'st wag thy tongue  
In noise so rude against me?"

\* \* \* "Such an act  
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty;  
Calls virtue hypocrite; takes off the rose  
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,  
And sets a blister here." —SHAKESPEARE.

The Earl of Brackleigh was unquestionably greatly agitated by his unexpected rencontre with Hagar Lot.

It was not that he was disturbed by discovering that, instead of standing face to face with the Marchioness of Westchester, he was confronted by a gipsy; but because he recognized that gipsy, although they had not met for many years.

There are some kinds of faces which, once seen, we never forget. Hagar Lot's was a countenance of that description. Years might elapse—she might pass from girlhood to approaching old age—and yet her face would not undergo such change that one who had once beheld it would fail to recognize after a long interval of separation.

The Earl of Brackleigh had not an acute, nor even a commonly good memory; he seldom exercised it; he considered it rather a bore when it acted independent of his control. Disagreeable events were always the first to present themselves, especially when unbidden; and so many acts of his past life were best forgotten, that he rarely, if he could help it, permitted his mind to ramble in search of circumstances whose resuscitation afforded him the very opposite emotion to exulting gratification.

He, on finding that it was not the Marchioness of Westchester who accosted him, would very gladly have claimed the protec-

tion of oblivious memory the moment his eye raced over the features of the stern, gloomy gipsy, and, offering her a few pieces of money, have passed on—anywhere, so that it was out of her sight. But his memory was only too faithful, only too vivid; he knew, at a glance, who stood before him, and, for a minute, he could hardly keep himself from fainting.

At no time could he have encountered this remarkable woman with indifference, or even calmness or equanimity; but here, within the grounds of the Marquis of Westchester, upon which he was himself a trespasser—within he knew not how many yards of the Marchioness, of whom he was in search, and who, if any disturbance ensued between himself and this woman, would be drawn to the spot—here the meeting filled him with trepidation; and as he beheld her, and heard the low, distinct, and sonorous tones of her well-remembered voice, it seemed as if the powers of sense, sight, hearing, life itself, were being drawn swiftly from him.

Hagar perceived how much her unlooked-for presence agitated him. She saw his blanched cheek, his shrunken eyelid, and his tottering step—a gleam of fierce exultation shot from her eyes.

"Well met, I say once more, my Lord!" she exclaimed, as she observed him endeavor to master his quivering emotion. "I perceive that you recognize me. I see that you recall my features with a sickening sense of shame and of fear. I do not marvel at your confusion, nor at your palpable terror. I know your errand here, and I, too, feel that it would be a most unpalatable situation for you to be compelled to listen to the unparaphrasing remarks upon your conduct to me, which I shall have to make, knowing that ears, which for worlds you would not have catch my observations, are drinking in every word. It is fit that you, who never felt for others, should now suffer on your own account."

"A—a—if you desire—a—to have—an interview wi—wi—with me—a—I will grant you one—a—but not now—not here," stammered the Earl, yet speaking rapidly.

She waved her hand.

"Here, and now!" she returned, with stern and deliberate emphasis. "I have much to say to you. The time for my address to you has come. We could have selected no better place for it."

"But," urged the Earl, hastily, "you do not know, perhaps, that I have no right to be here—that I am trespassing—that, if discovered here by the sound of voices in conversation, that discovery will be followed by my instant expulsion—nay, in all human probability, by something much worse."

"How worse? Explain yourself, my Lord Brackleigh," she observed, coldly, as she gazed steadfastly at him.

"Hush!" he rejoined, raising his hand with a gesture of caution. "Do not repeat my name in such loud tones; by so doing, you only precipitate events."



"To what do you allude?" she said, in a half-sarcastic, half-savage tone.

"Bloodshed!" he responded, emphatically.

"Whose?—yours?" she rejoined, instantly, with a sneer.

"Or that of others!" he answered, sharply, as though stung by her sneering tone.

"Ay!" she exclaimed, with a short laugh, which made his blood run cold. "Murder!—that is usually the goal to which we wade through crimes such as you have committed."

She paused abruptly, although she was about to append something to that remark; and he took the opportunity to again urge upon her the propriety of their meeting in some place less calculated to be dangerous to them both.

"It is not dangerous to me," she returned, quickly. "You best know how dangerous it is to you, and wherefore. Let me add, that it is my intention not to permit your convenience to interfere with mine. Your wishes have been too often deferred to by me; it is my turn now."

"What if I will not listen to you?" he said, gloomily.

"You shall—you must," she rejoined, slowly, and with a strong emphasis upon the last word. "If you were to attempt to quit me now, I would summon the people of the Marquis of Westchester, and denounce you. know the purport of your visit here. I would reveal it."

"What! if I dared even that, rather than remain here alone with you, to hear what I have no difficulty in surmising that you purpose saying to me—complaints which will gain you nothing, and will do mischief to others whom you can have no interest in injuring."

"You have but to dare it to find that all I intend to pour into your ear while alone with me shall be delivered before a most attentive audience, well provided with chattering tongues," she replied, promptly. "Let me, however, advise you, before you determine upon the course you will pursue, that though you may surmise something which is likely to fall from my lips—your guilty conscience will enable you to do that—you have no conception of much that I intend to reveal to you. Much that, if you have one spark of human feeling or sympathy for others than yourself, will make you wince like a beaten hound under the lash. I may add, that as I expect nothing from you, it is not my intention to seek to gain anything from you; and if I should fall into a complaining tone, there will be nothing to follow calculated to bring down mischief on any one but myself, perhaps."

"I suppose that the shortest and simplest plan will be to run all risks, and hear what it is you may have to reveal, and of which I have no conception," he observed, after a minute's silent reflection. "I must suggest that you will be speedy in making your communication to me; for if we should be interrupted, as I strongly suspect we shall before our conference

is half over, I must peremptorily decline to renew or repeat it in any form."

"You may be an English earl, and, therefore, in the eyes of the world, an honorable gentleman; but in the eyes of the Great Spirit, you cannot fail to appear a heartless, execrable villain!" she exclaimed, with intense bitterness and scorn. "But let me bid you beware how you condemn me. Man, you cannot forget the promise I made to you when last we parted, or the curse which I called down upon your head—the curse has been working slowly and surely. It rests in some degree with yourself, whether the promise be fulfilled or not."

"You mistake me," he cried, a little eagerly, on having the promise recalled to his memory. "I do not condemn you. I have no intention of doing so. I simply suggest to you that it will not be possible—it would be most unwise—to repeat an interview which can only waken up memories painful to both—memories which now had far better be dormant until death removes us; and which, while it can produce you no benefit, will be singularly disadvantageous to me."

"We will provide for the difficulty when the emergency arrives," responded Hagar, moodily. "At present, we are alone, and for a time shall continue so. I have told you that I knew of your coming, and the motive which has conducted you hither. This meeting between us is not an accident. I contrived that it should take place. Now, my Lord Brackleigh, are you prepared to listen patiently to what I have to say, or to find yourself within a minute from this time in the custody of the servants of your good friend, the Marquis of Westchester?"

The Earl frowned until his eyes were hidden by his brows.

"Proceed," he said, with resumed coldness, in reply, and turned partly from her, so that she could not, without a direct movement, watch the working of his features while he was speaking.

"It will be necessary to recur to some portion of my past life," she commenced, speaking slowly, and enunciating her words with a marked emphasis. "I shall do this with the intention of keeping the connection between all the parts of my communication to you unbroken. Your memory, too, my Lord, is defective; and it will be necessary to remind you of some events, that you may the more fully and completely comprehend the relation which others will bear to them."

"I do not think I shall forget any of the circumstances to which you are likely to allude," he interposed, a little fretfully.

"So much the better, my Lord," she replied; "but you may think it convenient to appear to do so. I shall take care that you do not. When you first met me, my Lord, you found me moving in the society of those whose rank in their own land surpassed yours in this country. They were emigrants in political exile, it is true; but they were not the less



noble in blood and exalted in station, although here they lived in a less unostentatious fashion than when at home in the fertile hills and vales of sunny South. They were received in the highest circles, and they were justly entitled to the respect no less than the consideration of those whom they admitted to their homes. You were introduced to me as a Viscount; I to you as the daughter of a Count of Spain. We met upon a par, and we treated each other as equals. You see me in the gipsy garb now. I wear the badge of humiliation not because it is my proper attire, but because you reduced me even to a lower level than that which is held by those with whom I now mostly herd. You may not admire that word, my Lord, but for its terrible meaning as applied to me you are solely responsible.

"You attracted my notice by your flattering attentions. Your personal appearance excited my admiration, for it was the successful result of close and diligent study, as well as patient daily labor. You wooed me and won my love by those arts which men who study to betray women know how to employ when their aim is simply the ruin of the object they profess to worship. Cold and apathetic as you appeared to others, you were to me when alone all ardor, passion, adoration. You bent upon me burning looks; you breathed in my ears passionate words; you sought to make me believe that the reciprocation of your passion by me was the life-pulse of your heart; that if I refused it to you, that pulse would be snapped assunder, and that you would perish. You vowed, you sighed, you went upon your knees, dog! and wept—do you forget that?—and wrung from me the confession that your fiendish arts had succeeded—that the love you bore me was scarcely equaled by the intensity of my own. When this craft had reaped its reward, you coined difficulties in the way of marriage—even in the possibility of our continuing to meet. You pictured yourself reduced to misery, agony, despair, when separated from me. I knew what my own unhappiness would have been, had, as I then would have called it, implacable Fate, divided us. You urged me to fly with you for a brief period, until you could smooth away all the difficulties which surrounded us, and introduce me to the world as your best-beloved wife.

"I was then a poor, young, credulous girl—a child, for I was not sixteen—ignorant of the world's cruel deceptions; for my mother, having married a Count of Spain, her father resolved that I should be so educated and reared as to bring no discredit upon my father's name. From my first arrival in England, I had been placed at a school exclusive in the selection of the pupils instructed there: It is unnecessary to mention how the introduction was obtained—it is enough that the Marchioness of Westchester, the proud Constance Plantagenet, was not better educated than myself. But though I had been well instructed in the book-lore of the world, of the world itself I knew nothing.

I believed implicitly all that you said. I needed not your oaths, entreaties, knee-worship, your tears, to move me—I would have died for you. I thought it but a small sacrifice to do what you asked of me with such passionate implorations.

"I fled with you. I had better have leaped into a yawning gulf, and there have perished by being dashed into a thousand fragments.

"For a brief space you kept me in a delirium of happiness. You would not suffer me to think, to reason, to see, to know aught but that you loved me. Indeed, then I wanted to know no more.

"I knew not that you had inducted me into evil, and had glossed your deed over with specious and plausible deceits. But I had a strange, silent sadness fall suddenly upon my spirits: I knew not wherefore. It was the still small voice beginning to make itself heard. I found suddenly—for in the intoxication of my delight while with you, I had not observed others, I had thought of gazing only on you—I found suddenly that, when abroad, women shunned me, and men stared offensively at me. I marveled, for I did not comprehend why.

"At this time, while walking alone—for you, pleading some imperative engagement, had left me, as you said on parting, to pass a few wretched days away from me—I met the father of my mother, who had been in wild pursuit of me from the moment he had heard of my flight from those in whose custody I had been placed.

"It was a short but terrible interview. He quickly extorted from me the cause of my flight. He seized my hand, and glared at my fingers. There was not a ring upon one of them.

"He howled imprecations in my ears. He made me comprehend the position in which you had placed me, and he heaped curses upon my head.

"I cursed him back again, for he had showered upon your head epithets of the vilest kind—epithets which sounded in my ears worse even than the rankest blasphemy; and I fled from him—fled to our home, to seek a letter which I expected would be awaiting me—a letter from you, to be filled with protestations and vows which would contain internal evidence of your love, your honor, the impossibility that you could ever play me false.

"I found, indeed, a letter awaiting me, and it was from you. I devoured its contents. You informed me in it that you had discovered the error into which passion had led us both, and that you greatly regretted the step which we had both taken. You had considered it to be incumbent upon you not to prolong our mutual shame, and therefore, with considerable reluctance, you had torn yourself away from me. You advised me to return quietly to my friends, to make any plausible excuse which I could invent for my absence, and to keep my secret locked within my own breast, as I might rest assured that if I never revealed it to a living person, the world would never be any the wiser. The prospects of



marriage with some person more fortunate than yourself, you added, would certainly be open to me, and you trusted that I would eventually prove a happy woman.

"That was the purport of your communication to me. I wonder I did not drop dead ere I reached your vile signature—itself a lie, for you palmed yourself upon me and my friends under an assumed name. It, however, did not slay me. The intelligence of your death, while I was yet laboring under the delusion you had woven for me, would have killed me; your villainy roused a more terrible emotion—more terrible, for it would have been happiness to me to die—more terrible, because the passions roused were hatred and revenge—an undying hatred, a never-to-be-satisfied revenge.

"I recalled the curse which I had invoked upon him who had cursed you, and I cursed you myself with a bitterness of heart, such only as one could have felt who, being wronged as I had been, had such a nature as mine.

"Then followed an interval of madness, of incarceration in an asylum for lunatics, an escape, a brooding over thoughts of revenge, and a settled determination to obtain it.

"A sudden and unlooked-for meeting enabled me, though only for a moment, to fasten upon you, and tell you that I had sworn to have your life. I have kept my oath, and I will yet keep it. I have aided in taking from you a life of happiness; I will give you a further term of mental torture; and, when my own hour for quitting a world which has furnished me with nothing but misery arrives, I will drag you down to perdition with me.

"Have you finished?" said the Earl, in a low, but defiant, scornful tone, as she paused. "Let me, if you have, assure you that I hold your threats in derision. Let me further inform you, that you have had nothing whatever to do with the happiness of my life. Circumstances over which you could not possibly have had any control may have affected some of my views, but that they have disturbed my happiness is simply absurd. I accept your hatred, revenge, threats, anything you please, so that it terminates this disagreeable interview; but before it is over, I request you to permit me, as you have accused me of depriving you of one delusion, to disabuse your mind of another. It is all very well to call a man a villain, a betrayer, an unprincipled, heartless wretch, because a weak-minded girl has deceived herself into a belief that the impulses of passion are the signs of a chaste devotion, but there is something also to be said in extenuation of his conduct. If I thought you handsome when I first saw you, your eyes told me that my admiration was anything but offensive to you. You gave me back look for look, smile for smile. You were, or affected to be, flattered when I spoke to you. You were prompt in receiving my advances; you lent a ready ear to my words; you acted in every way not alone to create love in my breast, to fascinate me, but to inflame my passion, so that you might encircle me with a chain which

I could not break. I saw through the artifice. We played a game to deceive each other. I succeeded; you did not; and therefore I am a villain. But what if you had succeeded—what if you had hooked me into a binding ceremony, and had turned out to be what I now find you?—you would have been—my wife, and therefore entitled to triumph in the deception which you had practiced on me. It is not every man who finds that, after the marriage-ceremony is over, the woman who before it so frowned upon him, caressed him, appeared to love him for himself only, and to have no other wish than such as he would frame, is quite the same person. The same evil principles which have developed themselves in your nature since we first met would have shown themselves if we had been united. They were in your breast, though dormant. It is, therefore, a fortunate escape for me; and you, having found out that I did not turn out what you anticipated, ought to congratulate yourself that you have had a fortunate escape, too. You tried to ensnare me: I succeeded in ensnaring you. Two people who throw a cast of dice do not quarrel because one of them wins. Let this foolish matter end here, and here let the interview end, too. Let it also be our last in this world."

He turned to depart, but she intercepted him. She caught him fiercely by the wrist.

"Our interview has barely commenced," she said, between her teeth. "You cannot depart until it is ended. I have been speaking to you of matters which have occurred between me and you. I shall proceed to speak of you and others. I am about to gratify you with some information concerning one Constance Plantagenet and her child—ha! that makes you start, does it? You will start and quiver more before I have done with you. Let me, however, first express my utter scorn at your retort upon me. It wanted but that piece of meanness to crown your heartless villainy to me. Yet if I can extract comfort out of anything, it will be the knowledge that I have been able to successfully thwart all your plans upon the Marchioness of Westchester for the last ten years."

"You?" he ejaculated, with angry surprise.

"I!" she answered, grimly. "When I escaped from the mad house, I searched for you as a starving tiger searches for prey. I changed then from what you knew me to what I am. As a gipsy, and with a tribe which, from causes which can be of no interest to you, were bound to serve me, I was not only able to obtain the means to live—a matter of indifference to me, but for the object which I had at heart—but it afforded me facilities for working out certain designs which I had planned against your ease and comfort, as well as against your peace of mind, as I had sworn I would. Of these plans I will speak no further, than to admit that they were mostly frustrated by circumstances which, in spite of all my efforts, I failed to control.



"In the midst of my disappointment and despair, Fate conducted to me Constance, Marchioness of Westchester."

"She sought me, proud Lord of Brackleigh, in order that I might spirit away a child—a young, fair, lovely, haughty child—her child, Earl Brackleigh—your child, Earl Brackleigh. I found the child sleeping in a little bed in one of the humblest cots in Beachborough. I stole it as it slept."

"Wretch!" muttered the Earl, with livid lips.

"O! but Fate had found me, at last, a way to wreak vengeance!" she responded, quickly.

"What, do you dare to tell me that Constance, Marchioness of Westchester, engaged you to steal a child which was hers, and which she dared not acknowledge?" cried the Earl, with considerable excitement.

"Is your lordship anxious that her husband, the Marquis, should make a third person at this interview?" she responded, sarcastically. "You have but to elevate your voice a little more, and your object will be obtained!"

He started, and gazed around him nervously. Then he said, hastily, and in a lower tone:

"What proof can you give to me that you are speaking the truth? You have confessed to having designs against my peace, and therefore you have an interest in falsifying facts when addressing me!"

"In my present narration, I have, at least, an interest in telling the truth," she added, with a marked enunciation. "It is my object to wring your heart, if you have one to wring—to drive you to desperation and madness, as you did me. I tell you that what I have said, and what I shall say to you, are facts. Is it not a fact that you wooed Constance Plantagenet in secret?"

"Well?"

"That you met her, and made her believe that you loved her?"

"I did love her!"

"You did?"

"I did, and do now!"

"What now—still?"

"Passionately—madly. She is the only woman I ever loved—shall ever love! Will that serve you?"

"Why, I thought you had done your worst!" gasped Hagar, grasping at a branch of a tree for support; "but I find that you still make me feel that you can further insult me, further degrade me, can make my hatred of you yet more venomous, my desire for vengeance yet more fierce and vindictive. Your words have been like a succession of stabs upon an already deeply-wounded heart. And now hold your heart, fiend of the remorseless nature! for my tongue shall stab it as deeply and as poisonously as yours has gashed mine!"

She paused for a moment to wipe the clammy sweat from her brow, and, drawing a deep breath, she said, between her teeth:

"So you admit that you passionately love the wife of another?"

He bent his head down to hers, and said, also between his clenched teeth:

"My wife, woman!"

She recoiled from him.

"What!" she cried, in a tone of unaffected horror; "would you have the atrocious audacity to insinuate to me—to me, Lord Brackleigh, that you have both been guilty of bigamy?"

"No—no—no!" he cried, hurriedly. "I should have said, she who ought to have been my wife!"

Hagar looked at him steadfastly, penetratingly; her lips muttered and moved; he had given her a clue to an idea which she had not hitherto conceived. She had all along supposed that he, Bertram, had, by some villainous contrivance, succeeded in beguiling and betraying the Marchioness, as he had her, and that though the consequences of his infamy were more serious to the Marchioness than to her, yet the former had managed to conceal her secret from the world.

Now she saw their connection in a new light—what if there really had been a secret marriage? How securely she would have him, ay, and the Marchioness, too, in her power! Both would have violated the law, and poor Floret would be a legitimately-born lady after all.

Here, indeed, was food for vengeance more ample than she could have ever dreamed of, far less hoped for.

She mentally vowed to break the hearts of all—she would destroy them. She hated the Marchioness now; for she must have been who had robbed her so suddenly of Bertram's love. She hated Floret, for she was the child of those whom she hated; and most deadly of all was her hatred of Bertram, for he having ruined her, was allied to two beings who might yet render him happy.

Such a throng of thoughts swept through her brain that, for a few moments, she could not speak. She swiftly resolved to leave no stone unturned to discover what Liper Leper could have proved to her, and did not; and if she should be able to confirm her suspicions, she determined that no spark of mercy or compassion which might rise up in her heart, either for the Marchioness or Floret, should interfere to prevent her glutting her vengeance.

Recovering, by a remarkable effort, her outward composure, she said:

"It is simply a mockery to say to me that she ought to have been your wife; but let it pass, and listen!"

She passed her hands over her temples, and then said, in low, distinct tones:

"Constance Plantagenet, after you had made her your prey, retired to Beachborough Abbey in delicate health—do you remember that?"

"Go on—I do," he responded, impatiently.

"While there, she, in secret, was delivered



of a child—a daughter,” continued Hagar. “This child was intrusted to a confidant, one Fanny Shelley. You remember Shalley?”

With white face and parched lips he nodded assentingly. He could not speak.

“She was the foster-sister of Constance Plantagenet, and, therefore, could be trusted. Now, mark me, Earl Brackleigh! Constance Plantagenet recovered her health, and returned to London. Fanny Shelley accompanied her thither. But after a lapse of time—not great interval—Fanny Shelley reappeared at Beachborough with a child. She said that it was one which had been intrusted to her to nurse. She told the truth; but the village folks did not believe her—her lover did not believe her—her lover, Lord Brackleigh—no, proud and haughty peer of this great realm, he did not believe her, and within a few days afterward she was found horribly murdered in Beachborough Brook—murdered on account of your child!”

“My God!” ejaculated the Earl, staggering backward gasping, “this cannot be true!”

“It is true,” retorted Hagar, speaking with strong emphasis. “Your deliberate and sinful villainy compassed the murder of an innocent girl at the very outset—”

“No—no—no!” cried the Earl, with deep emotion.

“I tell you it did, and that it did not stop there,” she rejoined, vehemently. “The lover was tried for the murder, but there were no proofs, and he was acquitted; but every man’s face was averted from him, every woman hissed at, or shunned him. Self-expatriated, he went abroad, leaving behind him a home which had once been happy, and he its brightest ornament; desolate. The parents of poor Fanny Shelley lie in the same grave with their murdered child. They died of broken hearts.

“If this were true, it would crush me forever,” he murmured, almost distinctly.

“It is but the beginning,” rejoined Hagar, fiercely; “but the beginning. If your heart can be crushed, it will be before I shall have reached the end. Be silent, and note every word I shall say. That child—your child, Lord Brackleigh—was left a pauper legacy to the village of Beachborough, and was supported by those who could barely support themselves. It was reared by one and another, it had no home, and wandered about from cottage to cottage for a meal and for shelter, and it was known only in the village by the name of the POOR GIRL!”

“Stay—one word!” interrupted the Earl, in a faint voice, trembling and quivering in every limb as he spoke. “You who assume to know so much, and who assert that you are speaking facts, tell me, before you proceed further, did Constance Plantagenet know the fate of her foster-sister, and the condition of—of the—the—the child?”

“Not then,” returned Hagar, immediately, “at least she did not, so far as I know, and as I believe. She had been five years a mar-

chioness when she revisited Beachborough. Why she went thither, or what were her thoughts when she entered the abbey, she alone will tell you; it is enough for the purpose of my narration, that it was at this visit she beheld the Poor Girl, and learned its history. It was at this period that she sought a gipsy in the wood, in the obscurity of night, and encountered me. I was there for the purpose of obtaining a supply of money to carry out an object I had in view, and with which you were connected. I was hired by her to steal the child from the village, and—”

“What?” he half-screamed,

“Not murder it,” continued Hagar, “no; but to be less merciful to it. It was an object of horror and loathing to the Marchioness.”

“No—no; say not that it could not have been—it was her own child,” he exclaimed, excitedly.

“And yours,” she exclaimed, with a biting sneer, “and therefore she loathed it. She called upon me to bear it away, and place it where it could never be seen again by her; in some obscure spot from whence its name could never reach her; where it might exist or die in such a fashion that it could never cross her sight—perhaps her memory—more.”

“She could not be so foully heartless,” he ejaculated, in a tone of despair.

“Do you say that of one you love so passionately?” returned Hagar, between her teeth. “Know that she was so heartless, and was not, had the worst come to the worst, prepared to halt there. You, you who love her so adoringly, will yet learn that. I tell you, Lord Brackleigh, she would not look into the face of the child, but she gave me money, and she went her way, and I went mine.”

“You—you! Whither did you bear the child?” he cried, gasping for breath, like one exhausted.

“To a low, pestilential neighborhood, in the most noisome and loathliest locality in this huge city,” she returned, with biting emphasis. “I deposited her there in the custody of an old member of the gipsy tribe. I knew my man. I saw that the girl-child was young and fair. I was well acquainted with his grasping avarice. I knew that he would keep her in a beggar’s home, but that he would make a market of her beauty. I left her with him—your child, Lord Brackleigh.”

“Fiend! Witch! I—I—I—”

The Earl tossed his hands wildly in the air, and sank at her feet in a fit.

She watched him with an eager and excited look for a moment, and then she folded her arms, and spurning him with her foot, looked down upon him with a gleam of exultation and a smile of triumph.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

"Beneath what hateful planet, on what hour  
Of desperation, by what fury's aid,  
In what infernal posture of the soul,  
All hell invited, and all hell in joy  
At such a birth, a birth so near of kin,  
Did her foul fancy whelp so black a scheme?"

—YOUNG.

The Earl of Brackleigh was not a man to be easily affected by intelligence of a serious kind. He was by nature apathetic, and he had schooled himself from boyhood to be, or at least to appear, listless and indifferent at times when other persons were excited or affected.

The origin of this systematic display of unconcern might have been traced to a spirit of selfishness, which was strong within him. The oft-recurring thought, "this is nothing to me", urged him to preserve a species of insensibility which, though truly aristocratic, did no credit either to his sense or to his heart. But for all that, he felt, and felt deeply, too, as we have just seen, when his own immediate interests were touched.

He sacrificed his love upon the altar of Mammon. He parted with a young and lovely woman because he foresaw that by wedding her against the consent of her family, that he should obtain no portion with her, and he surrendered her for one who was personally, in most respects, inferior to her, but who, in a pecuniary sense, was vastly her superior.

When he was surfeited with wealth, he wanted his young and beautiful bride back again; but he could not get her. He had himself assisted to place her beyond his own reach, and now he believed that she was necessary to his happiness; consequently, he felt deeply, and the more deeply, perhaps, from his continued and anxious efforts to conceal his feelings. The recovery of Constance he regarded as "something to him"; he, therefore, worried and fretted, and was in a constant state of inward excitement, because he found it next to impossible to carry out his aim.

The revelations of beauty, as they proceeded, acted upon this internal agitation, and made him susceptible to any blow she might deal him, through some disclosure calculated to be more hurtful to his pride than any he had yet heard.

Since his interview with Floret, whom Lady Brackleigh had dragged so unceremoniously from his presence, he had gradually worked himself up to the belief that she was his child. This conviction when he remembered how beautiful Floret was, would have filled him with an entrancing joy, but for the fear that, as she had passed her young life in an atmosphere of want and poverty, she could not have escaped moral corruption.

If his surmise happened to prove correct, he saw that he had found her only to shun her, and that she, instead—as he had at first supposed she would—of being an instrument by which he could effect a reunion with Constance, would, in reality, prove an effectual bar to their being reunited.

Every statement Hagar made inflicted a

desperate wound upon his pride, although he tried to assume a calm and imperturbable demeanor; but when he learned that he, proud of his rank and lofty station, was the father of a young girl, of whose beauty a wretched old gipsy had made a market, and that his own legal wife, the woman he so loved, had consigned this child to such a horrible fate without pity and without remorse, the shock to his pride was too great for his powers of endurance, and he fell beneath the blow in a convulsive fit.

Hagar, as he fell, stood over him with a triumphant smile, like a spirit of evil. She twice or thrice spurned him with her foot, and muttered, between her grating teeth:

"You hurled me to the dust without mercy, wretch! It is fit that that you should lie humiliated and broken-spirited at my feet. You wrecked forever my happiness—seek henceforth for your own. You will find it only in the same region where I shall grasp mine—eternity!"

After contemplating him for a minute or so with exultation, she saw his death-like face turn slowly toward her. The expression of intense pain upon the features, the agonized rolling of his eyes, the restless movement of his blue lips, seemed to make an impression upon her stern nature. She had once loved him fondly; he had deceived, betrayed, insulted her, and she believed her love was turned into the fiercest hate, and that the only passion which the sight of him stimulated in her breast was an ardent desire of vengeance. Yet the glance at his pallid face, his evident suffering, touched that soft place in her woman's nature which makes the sex, in the hours of anguish and affliction, of sickness and misery, truly ministering angels.

She bent over him, and as she saw the contortions of his features, and listened to his groans, scalding tears fell from her eyelids even on to his white cheeks.

"They are the last that he shall ever extort from me," she murmured. "He never knew the depth of that love which he flung away so ruthlessly; he shall live to know the bitterness of the hatred he has sown in its place."

She drew from her pocket a small phial, and moistened his lips and nostrils with its contents. She raised his head, and supported it upon her knee. She parted his hair, which had strayed over his forehead, and she bathed his temples with the stimulant until he opened his eyelids, and gazed wildly around him.

He sat for an instant motionless, and then he jumped to his feet, and gazed steadfastly upon the face of Hagar. He perused her features attentively, and presently a deep sigh escaped from his lips; he turned away, and resting his elbow against the stem of a tree, he covered his face with his hands, and tried to recall all that had passed between himself and her before the fit had seized him.

It came back bit by bit, slowly, but it came back, every word of it; and when he had remembered all, he shuddered, and then removing his hand from his eyes, he said to her:



"I confess I have been greatly unnerved by your communication. If it can afford you any satisfaction to know that you have inflicted the greatest torture possible upon me—"

"It can!" she interposed, eagerly.

"Be satisfied, then," he rejoined, "for you have wounded me more deeply than I can find words to describe."

"It affords me intense satisfaction," she responded, "yet I am not satisfied."

He waved his hand.

"Let me speak," he said, sharply, although he enunciated his words with difficulty. "You believe yourself to have been wronged by me."

"Believe myself?" she echoed, with a laugh of rage. "Why, villain, you decoyed me into an infamous snare. You made a trap for me out of the very love I bore you. You blasted my reputation. You destroyed my innocence. You have utterly and wholly wrecked my happiness in this life, and by the infamy of your conduct have more than imperiled my hereafter, and you say coolly that I believe myself to be wronged—"

"Peace for a few minutes," he interrupted. "Do not let us haggle about terms. Granted, I have wronged you; your wrong is, however, but a mental one. You thirst for vengeance; you have, in the revelations which you have this night made to me, more than slaked it, were it ten times as fierce—"

"I have not," she interpolated, sternly.

Without heeding her interruption, he went on:

"No mental torture that you can conceive can approach that which you have inflicted upon me, and which I must endure while I live. Still, I do not conceal from myself that you have made your statements to me while animated by a spirit of revenge, and, therefore, I have a right to assume that you have given to them an exaggerated coloring, which makes them appear more terrible than they are. Divested of all exaggeration, they cannot fail to be to me both painful and humiliating, and that ought to be sufficient to glut your desire for vengeance. I entreat you, therefore, to think over what you have said, and recall all that you have advanced which will not bear the test of proof, and strip every assertion of enlargement beyond the strict truth, and then, even then, you may feel assured that you leave me a broken-spirited, broken-hearted man."

"My Lord Brackleigh," returned Hagar, sternly, "do you think I could exaggerate a description of my own wrongs? It is possible you may; but understand me to believe that they far outstrip in atrocity what words can adequately express, that no degree of what is termed hyperbole could reach them. Believe this also of the revelations which I have tonight made to you, and which are not yet completed. The story throughout is too terrible for exaggeration. I have confined myself to the strict limits of the stern truth, feeling that nothing that I could add would strengthen or

sharpen the horror which the circumstances themselves, told in the plainest terms, must convey. You have no shelter from the storm which is bursting upon you, and you have but one escape from it."

"What is that?" he inquired, eagerly.

"You shall know presently," she returned, with a smile, which made an unpleasant thrill pass over his frame. "Let me complete the history of your child."

"Stay—one moment," he cried, arresting her speech. "You speak with a tone of authority respecting the child you assert to be mine. What is your authority for declaring that it is my child?"

"Its mother," answered Hagar, emphatically.

"Who!" he exclaimed, with a look of startled amazement.

Hagar repeated the words.

"It is impossible!" he cried, with asperity. "I will never believe that its mother revealed my name to you."

Hagar again smiled bitterly. With knitted brows she said to him:

"You say that you love still her whom you knew as Constance Plantagenet?"

"I repeat that I do—passionately," he cried, with excitement; "I repeat it, even though I know and feel that it is a dangerous admission to make in your hearing."

Her brow lowered gloomily.

"I have long known," she said, in a subdued tone, "that you never loved me. What matters it to me, then, whom you love, if I am not that person? I still ask you, do you love her as ardently now as you have affirmed that you do?"

"I do," he replied.

"And doing so, do you think that another deceived and betrayed her as sinfully, wickedly, shamefully as you did?"

He recoiled two or three paces, and groaned.

"I tell you that I know her to be its mother," continued Hagar; "and there is a sufficiently strong resemblance in the girl's features to yours to settle the question you are seeking to raise. She is your daughter—you feel it—you know it! Hug, therefore, to your heart these facts. Its mother has met it, and pursued it with an irreconcilable hate; she whom you so love gave it over to that destruction which is far worse than death. She consigned it to poverty and wretchedness—a squalid home, and mercenary wretches for guardians. Her days were passed shoeless in the streets; her nights upon a bag of straw, tossed into a corner of a filthy cell, reeking with a festering, fetid atmosphere. She, this young child, the daughter of the proud Earl of Brackleigh and the haughty Marchioness of Westchester."

"I will not believe it!" cried the Earl, with passionate vehemence. "Who should know the character, the nature, the heart, the soul of Constance Plantagenet so well as I? You lie, woman—you lie foully! Constance Plantage-



net never, in the frenzy of madness, could ever have conceived an act so cruel, so barbarous, so utterly and monstrously inhuman! I will see her—I will—I will at every risk, though I forfeited my life at the very close of the interview! I will tell her of this wild and infamous charge against her common humanity, and I shall hear her indignantly and scornfully denounce, and flatly contradict, your incredible story!"

"Your hard words, Lord Brackleigh, do not move me," said Hagar, with a curling lip. "But let me invite you to reflect, after you have heard from the lips of the Poor Girl, who has been and is the subject of our discourse, a confirmation of my story upon the character, the nature, the heart, and the soul, of Constance Plantagenet: reflect, my lord, heedfully and solicitously, and then love her as of old, if you can!"

"I am determined to see her, and learn all from her own lips," rejoined the Earl, in a fever of excitement. "If you have spoken the truth, then I have ended with the world; but if, as I conceive, as I feel, out of the promptings of vengeful jealousy, you have falsified the facts, then—beware of me!"

She turned upon him like a tigress.

"Beware of you!" she repeated, with impetuous scorn; "the day has passed for me to do that—you cannot injure me more than you have done. Beware of you, Lord Brackleigh! What can you do to harm me? You have trampled upon my love, you have tainted my purity, you have broken my spirit, my heart; you have made a restless wanderer, you have reduced me to a level lower than any to which one of my race ever sank! Why, what can you do to me? Slay me, perhaps; it would be the kindest of your deeds to me. Go to, I have nothing to fear from you. I have told you only the truth, and you shortly will have the power of proving what I have stated; the Countess of Brackleigh will give you the opportunity."

"The Countess!" ejaculated the Earl. He did not like the mention of her name; it told him that Hagar knew much more than he could have given her credit for.

"Ay, the Countess!" she rejoined. "Years since she had your child in her possession. She believed it to be your child then, but she was in no position to prove it. Her chances to do that are better now, and, if some information which I have this night received be true, she has again contrived to get her into her hands, and, if so, you will see her, you will recognize her, and—"

"I have seen her—I have recognized her. She bears the very name of Edith Plantagenet!" cried the Earl, hoarsely, half frantically. "I am beside myself with amazement," he added, speaking in a species of convulsive soliloquy; "this child was her secret; she never revealed her birth—its existence—to me. Why, then, give it the name, of all others, which, joined with its remarkable resemblance to herself, is calculated to betray her? I cannot

comprehend it. It has, however, brought the situation to the turning-point. I can endure this harassing condition of excitement and misery no longer. I will see Constance to-night. I will not leave these grounds until I do see her. Nay, if she comes not here, I will force my way to her chamber-door. I have the right to demand explanations from her, and I will do it, though at the cost of a pistol-bullet through my brain from her husband. When I do see her, I will compel her to reveal all the truth. I will bring her before her own child—my child. I will make it before both communicate its history, with all its incidents and facts, though every word she will utter may pierce our hearts like poisoned barbs; then, when I know all from the mouths of both who have the deepest interest in confining themselves to the strict truth, I shall know the course which will be open to me to pursue, I will determine upon it, and act promptly."

"After the interview which you have planned?" said Hagar, gazing steadfastly at him.

"After it," he replied.

"What if the Marquis of Westchester refuses to permit you to see his wife?" she said, with a bitter smile.

"He will not be consulted," returned the Earl, haughtily; "but I shall waste no more time in words. You have told me that you are in the confidence of the Marchioness of Westchester." "I am," she returned.

"Has she ever mentioned my name to you?"

"Never."

"Before you?"

"Never."

"Have you spoken it to her!"

"No!" cried Hagar, vehemently. "No! Should I have retained her confidence, think you, if I had let fall to her that I had been your victim? You know little of women's natures, my lord, if you think that they will repose confidence in, or even tolerate the presence of a rival, although she may have been the victim of the man they love. No; the Marchioness knows only that I am a gipsy, with more education than usually falls to a member of my tribe; that I am possessed of greater power than any of them; and that my knowledge and tact are of a higher order than belongs to one of my race. I know her secrets; she does not know mine."

The Earl did not ask her what reason she had for withholding from the Marchioness the history of her wrongs, and the name of the author of them. It did not occur to him to do so. A very little reflection would have told him that she was not likely to serve Constance faithfully, and that she would be included in her scheme of vengeance, whatever form it might take. Indeed, the only impression which he had respecting her at all was, that she would be stormy, would vituperate, and eventually be softened down and quieted by a sum of money.

He greatly wronged Hagar in this supposition as he had in other matters.



"To be frank with you," he said, with much earnestness of manner; "from your statement that you are in the confidence of the Marchioness, it occurred to me that you could contrive an interview between us. Whether such an act would minister to your plans of vengeance, I care not—I am equally indifferent whether it is opposed to them. I will see the Marchioness at all risk; but for her sake, I wish to do so secretly, without being observed. If you can contrive it, whatever injury you may through it do me, I will still thank you heartily and sincerely. I do not see how you can decline to accede to my request, for should any disturbance ensue through your refusal, I shall not hesitate to implicate you, and—"

"Add to the contempt with which you have already inspired me," interposed Hagar, half-turning from him as if in disgust. Then she added, in a low, gloomy tone, "you shall see her again. It will suit my plans that you should have an interview with her. I will be as frank as you. I am anxious that you should know how completely without hope you are of shielding yourself from disgrace, shame, humiliation, and the scorn of the world. Yet, withal, I would not have you die yet; and, therefore, in the strictest confidence, would advise you not to partake of anything whatsoever to eat or to drink while in the presence of the Marchioness."

"Eat or drink—what do you mean, woman?" he cried, with a mystified glare at her.

"This," responded Hagar, in a low, marked, terribly meaning tone; "that the Marchioness is in a desperate position, and must play a very desperate game: every word you will say to her will urge her on with impetuous force. She can neither turn nor recede; she must go on. Your absence from the world just now would relieve her of one of her most serious difficulties. There are poisons in existence, my lord, which are very subtle, very difficult of detection, and are very certain in their operation. The Marchioness is not without them. She who cares not for the comfort, the welfare, the happiness, nay, the life of her own child, will not be over-scrupulous about the man who should have been her husband, and was not honorable enough to act justly to her. Hark, do you hear that measured tread upon the gravel path?—every note of that footfall should beat heavily upon your heart. It is the footstep of the Marchioness of Westchester. She approaches this spot. Conceal yourself until she has passed; then follow and address her: the rest is in your hands and hers. I shall see you again when the hour of our reckoning has arrived."

As she concluded she instantly glided from the spot, leaving the Earl alone.

He hastily moved beneath the shadow of a tree, his heart at the same time beating quickly and violently.

Hagar's communication about the poison had fearfully disturbed him. "Was it possible that she could conceive the idea of mur-

dering him?" he asked himself; "if so, would it be possible for him to continue to love a woman with a nature so terrible?"

As the thought crossed him, a shadow fell upon the turf at his feet. He looked up; the Marchioness was within a few feet of him. She did not discover him in the obscurity in which he stood.

He recognized her stately form and proud step instantly. She appeared to be in a fit of deep abstraction, and she passed slowly on without looking around her.

He laid his clenched fist upon his heart.

"Though perdition faces me, I will speak with her," he muttered.

With a light step he emerged from his place of concealment, and followed her with a rapid step.

### CHAPTER XXX.

"It is the hour when from the boughs  
The nightingale's high note is heard;  
It is the hour when lovers' vows  
Seem sweet in every whisper'd word;

But it is not to listen to the waterfall  
That Parasina leaves her hall,  
And it is not to gaze on the heavenly light  
That the lady walks in the shadow of night;  
And if she sits in Este's bower,  
It is not for the sake of the full-blown flower—

There glides a step through the foliage thick,  
And her cheek grows pale, and her heart beats quick,  
There whispers a voice—" —BYRON.

The Marchioness of Westchester returned to England to face her fate—to control it, or to succumb to it.

After her arrival, she was not permitted to rest in a state of perplexing uncertainty. Events hurried her along so fast, she quickly perceived that it would be imperative upon her to do one or the other.

Mature reflection, however, failed to point out to her not only which would be the most proper course for her to pursue, but which would be likely to prove the most advantageous, as well as the most agreeable to her.

Strangely enough, she regarded the struggle which went on in her mind as one which was waged between duty and inclination.

Her notion of duty was somewhat peculiar—it comprehended a faithful adherence to the false marriage-vow she had taken at the altar with the Marquis of Westchester, and the resolute shutting out from her mind of all sympathy for, and, if possible, all recollection of her true husband and her child.

To follow the path this impression of her duty pointed out to her would, she foresaw, involve no small amount of firmness and of inexorable insensibility to the pleadings of her womanly sympathies. It would involve, also, a system of plot and counterplot, of subterfuge, and a systematic and sustained effort to destroy every kind of evidence which existed to prove the circumstances which, if known, would be fatal to her present position, and, also, any which might hereafter spring up—in truth, it was hardly possible for her to



imagine what adherence to her duty would entail.

Her inclination urged her to rejoin her legitimate husband, and to recover her long deserted child. If that could be accomplished without the sneers and taunts of the world, and without reviving painful memories, she felt that she would not hesitate a moment; but even the hasty conception of the first howl of contemptuous amazement, which her flight from the Marquis would raise, made her recoil from the step. To let matters take their course was plainly impossible; to move in any direction seemed to make crime a necessity.

It was while involved in the mazes of her position that the letter from Bertram was handed to her by her maid, Fane, and it was not without a severe struggle between her impression of her duty and her inclination that she read its contents. A species of curiosity, which was a part of her woman's nature, to know what he would say, allied to a fancy that he might use some observations, without intending it, to intimate a way out of her dilemma, prevailed over every other consideration, and she perused his epistle.

It was similar to the one which he had sent to her while she was staying at Raby Hall. It was filled with urgings to grant him an interview, repetitions of his vows of adoration, and promises to make her happier than she could have dreamed of being, even when they were first united. But he omitted to appoint the interview; he left to her the naming of time and place for their meeting, and that was precisely what she was too proud to do.

She read his note through a dozen times; but there was not a word in it from which she could extract a hint by which she could decide upon her future path—not a word which led her to form a higher estimate of him than she had when she parted from him.

There were some vague, whining threats in his epistle; but there was nothing to evidence a spirit of courageous manliness which would be likely to impel him, if she declined to elope with him in secret, to step forward and claim her, in spite of all the sacrifices he would be called upon to make, and in defiance of the punishment for the past which such a movement would necessarily draw down upon him.

If there had, indeed, been such a spirit dwelling within his breast, he would never have suffered her to have withdrawn herself from him; he would never have played the part he had done.

She tore his letter into shreds and burned the pieces; she tried to forget that she had read it, but in vain; she strove to banish him from her mind, but without success: even his proposition to grant him an interview haunted her, and an idea began to dawn upon her that, if such an interview were to be ever consented to by her, it was she who, after all, would have to fix the time and place, for she alone knew when it could be accomplished without detection, or without interruption.

She was distracted by those harassing thoughts, and was greatly disturbed, likewise, by a fear which clung to her that she, while with the Marquis some evening at one of the numerous assemblies or receptions which they attended, should encounter the Earl of Brackleigh.

She was conscious, when at such fashionable gatherings, that, closely as she watched every avenue, outlet, group of persons, or spot where he was likely to be met with, the Marquis watched them more sharply and more eagerly than herself, and she had a nervous apprehension that he intended to provoke a collision with Bertram if he encountered him, in order to extort from him, if possible, the circumstances which had attended his early connection with his Marchioness.

It was not possible that such thoughts incessantly passing through her brain should not have their due effect upon her nerves. She began to grow full of fancies, to feel depressed in spirits, to possess a disinclination to move abroad, to decline invitations, to feel ill at ease anywhere except in her own room. She would start at the sound of a voice, her heart would leap at a knock at her chamber door, and the fingers of any person laid unexpectedly upon her arm caused a cold shudder to pass through her frame.

She saw that the Marquis suffered equally with herself. She could not fail to see how thin he had become, how haggard, and how pale his face was, while his eyes were like fiery meteors, which seemed to be gradually consuming all his vital power, and to grow brighter as they drew nearer to annihilation.

He merely spoke to her; he knew that, whatever might have been the case, he had no cause now to be jealous of her, and he exhibited toward her none of that haughty imperiousness which he had felt compelled to use when his mind was racked with doubt, and which she had returned with such interest. He was simply cold and distant to her, frigidly ceremonious, and as little alone with her as he could contrive to be.

As she contracted her visits to her fashionable acquaintances, so she diminished her carriage-drives, until she almost passed her time in her own suit of apartments, varied only occasionally by a promenade in the exquisitely laid out grounds attached to Westchester House.

Since her return to England, Hagar Lot had contrived to obtain access to her, and had had repeated interviews with her. She had not assisted to calm her mind; for she had informed her of Floret's escape from school, her appearance at the gipsy camp, her subsequent unimpeded departure from thence, and of her journey to London, where, she informed her, she was at that moment residing, although she was unable then to say in what part.

Hagar, too, enlarged upon Floret's growth, form, face, accomplishments, and her mental qualifications. She predicted for her a short career of vice and horror in London, unless



she were sent to Australia or New Zealand, where she might contract a marriage with some honest settler, and there pass, in quiet obscurity, the remainder of her life.

Whatever might have been the inward emotions which the Marchioness suffered, she did not betray them outwardly. She listened to Hagar in haughty silence, and, when she had finished, she bade her make the necessary arrangements, as soon as she had discovered Floret, to send her to one of the colonies which she had named, and she promised to furnish the means.

Hagar, who had used every word she could select which was calculated to make the Marchioness wince and quiver with wounded pride, was unable to detect the bitter pain those words inflicted upon her; for she stood motionless, with eyes fastened upon the carpet, and, while she listened, neither spoke, moved, nor looked at her until she had finished, and then she turned coldly from her, making, in brief terms, the promise already named.

She made Hagar feel as though she was asking of her a favor for some one in whom she had taken a great interest, and that she granted it in an icy, patronizing way.

Hagar felt that Constance hated and loathed her, that she instinctively shrank from her, although she had been of service to her, and might still be. She assumed that it was the very nature of the service which she had performed, and the secrets of hers which she possessed, which had aroused the feeling of dislike; but in this she was wrong. Constance could not have explained why she entertained so decided an antipathy to her. She only knew that she felt the same aversion to her as she would to any one who had done her a great wrong.

It was that unspoken, intuitive perception with which Nature has endowed women, which told her she had crossed her path, and would cross it somewhere, somehow—she could not imagine how; certainly she did not dream it was as a rival.

On this very evening on which the Earl of Bracklough had encountered Hagar, supposing that she was the Marchioness, she had just quitted the latter, after what would have proved a very stormy interview between any other two women.

But then the Marchioness was high-bred, and in addressing a person whom she assumed to be greatly her inferior, she would not permit herself to display temper. Hagar was anxious to precipitate her into the commission of some kind of crime for which the law admitted of no extenuation. The Marchioness had never communicated any of her plans (save for the disposal of Floret) to Hagar, and she never intended to do so, and when the latter became conscious that, save in one matter, the Marchioness had confided to her nothing, she offered suggestions which were listened to and coldly declined. Hagar taunted her, and in language such as the Marchioness had not

heard her use, it was so much above her apparent station, but she only moved the latter to reply in similar tones; both were haughty and stern in their manner, sarcastic, and, upon the part of the Marchioness, contemptuous, in their allusions to each other, and, at length, the Marchioness terminated the scene, which she had conducted with cold dignity, by abruptly quitting the apartment, and leaving Hagar alone. The latter had stood all the time like a marble statue, and had spoken throughout in an undertone, making curious suggestions, which were of a fiendish character. Not the most scornful taunt which the Marchioness addressed to her appeared to make any change in her impassible demeanor; her eyes only occasionally gleamed and glared, as if they were lighted up by some internal flame, and when the Marchioness, with an imperious bearing, swept from the room, Hagar followed her only with her eyes until she disappeared.

Her lips moved for an instant; and then she too, glided away to the garden, where, most unexpectedly, she met the man who, from a bright, high-spirited, noble-hearted girl, had converted her into what she then was.

Although the Marchioness had quitted her with an offended air, she bore with her a suggestion which Hagar had submitted to her, and which now rankled and tossed most uneasily and painfully in her mind.

Hagar had alluded to the care-worn aspect which the countenance of the Marchioness wore. She called it a cloud upon her sunshine. She reminded her of a conversation which they had had at Raby Hall, and in a meaning tone said that the potion which she had then handed to her was as potent in removing the cloud which obscured her happiness as it was to bear her into the regions of eternity.

The Marchioness sternly rebuked her for her horrible suggestion, but it remained uppermost in her mind—it worried, harried her. She could not endure her chamber. She felt as though invisible hands were dragging her toward her escritoire, and unable to endure the struggle it cost her to keep herself away from it, she rushed into the garden to breathe.

The air of her chamber seemed to be laden with the dank, earthy odor of—a vegetable poison.

Once in the garden, and in the free, fresh air, pacing its graveled walks with her usual stately bearing and queenly step, she felt herself able to think, to wish that the Marquis had never been, and that Bertram had—always—even as when he first bent his mouth close to her burning cheek and whispered fond and passionate words to her.

It was a terrible train of thought, for it made the one man appear as a dark, hateful impediment to her happiness; and the other, an object it would be bliss to her to pass the rest of her life with.

As this thought rested upon her brain on its slow way through it, a quick step fell upon



her ear; a sharp, firm grip caught her wrist; a low, hoarse voice whispered in her ear:

"Constance!"

She turned like lightning.

Within a foot of her own was the face of the man who was then in her thoughts—Bertram, Earl of Brackleigh!

She did not scream, she did not faint, she did not struggle to fling off his vice-like clutch. She closed her eyes for a moment, and felt as if her whole frame, nerves, veins, blood, were changing into ice.

For an instant she was like one who had passed the boundary of life, and had entered upon the valley of the shadow of death.

She lost all recollection, all sense, feeling, touch.

For that one instant the world was a void to her.

The next she was conscious of a white face close to her own; of a hoarse, hissing, gibbering in her ear; of the shadows of dark trees—of—O, God! the terrible words from the lips of one from whom she had been parted for years:

"Woman, I am your husband!"

Then, indeed, she had a terrible struggle with her emotions; but her power of self-control, exerted with a passionate effort, prevailed.

She gasped for breath for a moment or two, and then, obtaining the mastery over her articulation, she said, in a low, but clear tone:

"Release me! I will listen to you!"

"Release you, Constance! What—to fly me, to summon help, to bring about that meeting in which I, or the man whose name you bear, must inevitably fall!"

"Bertram," she said, in the same tone which was audible, though uttered so faintly, "if you remember what I was, you will not hesitate to do that which I ask of you. You know that I did not fear you; I am unchanged. I do not fear you now."

"But"—

"Hesitate—and I will pour forth shriek upon shriek, in such rapid succession, that your detention will continue to be the act of less than a minute more!" she exclaimed, with determined emphasis. "I have said I will listen to you—when did I ever break my word to you?"

"Never—never—never!" he replied, rapidly, and with emotion. "O Constance—Constance! how bitterly, how ruthlessly, you have punished me for my seeming indifference to you!"

"Say freezing indifference!" she interposed, with an earnestness equal to his own. "Such a freezing indifference that it froze the first and passionate love of a young, unworldly heart into a mass of impenetrable ice, such as it has remained, even as it is."

"But I was young—a fool, mad, blind, Constance!" he rejoined, excitedly. "O Heaven! if you had but reflected—if you had but reasoned with me—if you had not leaped to a false conclusion, and acted upon that conclu-

sion, what years of surpassing happiness we might have both enjoyed—what years of bliss might be yet before us!"

A smile of pain and bitterness moved her lips.

"You forget," she said, with a sneer, which she did not attempt to conceal, "that I was young, a fool, mad, blind. I awoke to consciousness; I did reflect; I did reason with you. You know the result."

"But, good God, Constance, how did you reason with me?" he expostulated.

"Ask your own heart that answered me," she returned, turning from him.

"No—by my soul!—no, it did not!" he cried, with energy.

"What!" she exclaimed, turning upon him fiercely; "do you tell me that your heart had nothing to do with the arrangement at which you jumped with such alacrity—an arrangement which you knew would part us forever?"

"I have already told you, Constance, that you have, from the first instant you conceived the notion that I did not really love you, misunderstood my character!" she exclaimed, earnestly. She turned from him, impatiently.

"I repeat it!" he said, vehemently. "Remember what was my position, and what was yours, at that time. You were the daughter of an enormously wealthy man, proud of his position and his descent, who would have listened to no offer for your hand unless it came from a duke, or, at least, an earl. You knew then, that, had you wedded one beneath the rank which I have named, and without his consent, you knew he would never have received you again, and would not have left you a penny."

"Knowing that, I gave my hand to you," she said, emphatically.

"Ay," he answered quickly, "but in secret, and you preserved that secret closely. You must remember, too, that had I avowed the marriage that we had contracted to my father, he, finding that you, though of birth equal to that of any woman he could have desired as an alliance for me, were without fortune, would have acted with the same harshness to me that Mr. Plantagenet, your father, would have displayed to you. We both were conscious that an avowal of our marriage would have promptly plunged us into penury, and to preserve it secret was simply a piece of prudent policy. As a mere piece of common sense, I was then too truly fond of you to desire to place you in a position in which you would have had to suffer pecuniary straits, which were up to that time unknown to you; but I hoped that the day would come when I should be in a position to proudly, most proudly, acknowledge you to the world as my wife, and with the assent and approbation of your family and—"

"And with this hope you married the rich daughter of a railway navigator," she interposed, scornfully.

He raised his hand deprecatingly, and continued speaking with emphasis.



"Remember, Constance," he said, raising his hand deprecatingly; "that, at the period of which we are speaking, I never thwarted you in any wish that you expressed, any caprice that you formed, any intention you announced to me, however much I might in my heart have been opposed to either. You must recollect that you never consulted me in any matter; you never exhibited a disposition to do so. You may have acquainted me with some design you had in your head; but you never asked for my approbation or dissent. You carried it out. Well, if you formed an impression that I was selfish, that I consulted only my own pleasures, my own wishes, my own interests, what opportunity did you give me to regard you in any other light? You acted independent of me to the last."

"You should have spoken out, then," she exclaimed, quickly.

"What held you back from then laying bare your heart to me, if, as you say, you loved me with your whole soul?" he asked, in as eager a tone.

"What?" she exclaimed, scornfully. "What held me back? Pride! Would you have had me fall upon my knees before you, when I found that you were ready to give me up, as if I were a garment to be discarded, and say: 'Pray, love me still; what I have suggested is only a subterfuge to try whether you really love me?'"

"What think you, then, held me back?" he demanded, in his turn, with evident warmth. "Why, pride, too!" Constance, do you not think that I was wholly confounded by your proposition, that I did not listen to you with bewildered amazement, that I did not say to to myself: 'This creature, whom I have thought to be one of Heaven's masterpieces, with a nature pure, guileless, loving, and trustful, is utterly heartless? She proposes to disunite herself to me, having consented to be bound, and having bound herself, in the holiest bonds which could connect us together in life, as calmly as though she were about to suggest a brief separation for the purpose of pleasure-travel, and she, therefore, cannot care for me one straw. She does not, and, in all probability, never did love me! Do you think that I was not stung into silence by your proposition, that I did consent to its provisions like one in a dream, that, heart-crushed by the past, reckless of the future, I took the fatal step which has utterly destroyed my happiness, and induced me to trample upon that of one other being whom I now feel, bitterly, I ought not to have dragged down from a position of honor and felicity, to one of misery and degradation?'"

"You speak of Lady Brackleigh," observed the Marchioness, with a sneer.

"I do!" he said, firmly.

"It is a pity," she added, in the same tone, "that you, who are so tender of her honor, were not as tenacious of that of others, even of your own."

"I thought less of my honor than of grati-

fying your wishes, even to an extent which has deprived us both of happiness!" with an evident desire to impress upon her that his conduct in agreeing to a separation from her was guided by a desire to gratify her wish in everything.

She shook her head doubtfully, although she would have been glad to have believed that such was the case—ay, even though she knew that such a belief would have added to the misery of her position.

"You should have had faith in my truthfulness, Bertram!" she exclaimed, in a more pensive tone than she had yet used; "you would then have questioned me closely, and have elicited enough to have saved both from the horrors of our present position."

"Your truthfulness, Constance!" he responded, in a tone which made her wince and start as though he had drawn a sharp knife across her heart.

There was something so sarcastic, so questioning in its expression, that she could not help looking upon him with a gaze of indignant wonder.

"You appear to question my truthfulness!" she said, with compressed lips; "surely you have tested it within the last ten years, and should speak of it in terms of commendation."

"We were speaking of a period yet farther back, Constance," he said, dryly.

"Yet farther back!" she repeated, turning her flashing eyes upon him. "What would you dare insinuate?"

"Insinuate nothing!" he exclaimed, suddenly seizing her hand, and speaking in an impressive tone. "Constance, you are my wife in the eyes of God; you were made my wife before the altar of God, by a Divine law, which is rendered sacred by human laws. Now convince me of your truthfulness, and answer me with the truth only, before that God who now looks down upon us, and in whose presence we must some day together stand—answer me before Him and as my wife!"

She drew back from him amazed, not fearing—astounded, not terrified. She had no conception of the nature of the question he was about to put to her, and she marveled at his tone, for he had said that he was about to speak to her of a time anterior to her marriage with the Marquis.

She was not long kept in bewilderment.

He spoke with rapid and passionate earnestness:

"You will remember, Constance," he said, his voice quivering as he spoke, "that some few months after we were married, you complained of a slight indisposition—"

"It is so far back."

"Your pardon, do not interrupt me. You complained, I say, of being ill, of suffering from an attack of nervous debility. You consulted, you told me, a physician who had recommended to you change of air. He had suggested the south of France, Nice, Italy, even Madeira, but you found objections to all these places. The reasons with which you furnish-



ed me were, that the distance of each from London was so great, it would entail too long and too wide a separation from me; and you mentioned Beachborough Abbey. By Heaven! you start! I will not release you—not though you break your wrist in your effort to wrench your hand from mine. You must—you shall bear me, and answer me now. Ay, and truthfully, too.”

Constance grew as pale as ashes and as cold as death, and trembled like an aspen. It was in vain that she exerted herself to appear calm. After her first attempt to wrest her hand from his, all strength, all power to struggle even to support herself, seemed to have left her.

She was both amazed and terrified now, for she had a fearful presentiment of what was coming.

Bertram, finding her apparently motionless, presumed that she, on discovering that it would be useless to struggle with him, decided that it would be best to remain quiet: he therefore, almost fiercely:

“You, I say, mentioned Beachborough Abbey as the place in which you would prefer to take up your abode for a time. You proceeded thither. You stayed there for a few months. You took with you only your confidential maid and foster-sister, Shelley. While there, woman—wife—you had a child.”

She groaned, and swayed to and fro, as if she would, but for his firm grasp of her hand, fall senseless upon the ground.

“You had a child, Constance—my child and yours,” he repeated, with vehemence, though in an undertone. “Answer me truthfully, as you hope for the salvation of your soul, was it not so?”

“Are you sure that you observed Lady Westchester saunter in this direction?” suddenly exclaimed a voice near to them.

“Quite positive, my Lord,” replied a female voice.

“Then her ladyship must be somewhere near this spot,” continued the first voice.

“Almighty Heaven!” gasped the Marchioness, with a sudden spasm of fright. “Shield me, Bertram. It is the Marquis!”

Bertram shifted sullenly his hand from its hold of hers; he grasped her round the waist, drawing her to his breast, and with an air of desperation, he turned to face the advancing pseudo-husband of his wife.

#### CHAPTER XXXI.

“Love is a fervent fire  
Kindled by hot desire;  
For a short pleasure,  
Long displeasure,  
Repentance, is the hire;  
A poor treasure  
Without measure;  
Love is a fervent fire,  
Lo! what it is to love!”

—SIR THOMAS WYATT.

O those few dreadful moments!

The Marchioness stood close to Bertram; so close that she could feel the beating of his heart.

In the imminence of her peril she was conscious of that.

The certainty that there would within an instant's time be a terrible *eclaircissement*, a wild, stormy altercation, a sanguinary combat, did not so absorb her attention that the violent pulsation throbbing against her shivering shoulder escaped her notice.

She knew that it was his heart whose vibrations were so perceptible to her that she could scarce have counted them, and the knowledge thrilled her, even to the marrow.

Yes, she stood with her first love, half-embraced, expecting each moment to be discovered by the man whose marriage with her she had converted into the most humiliating shame.

They stood quite in the shadow of an enormous arbutus, and they stood silent and motionless.

Constance heard the measured step of the Marquis; she knew its sound; she detected, too, by the tone of his voice, that he was in an angry, bitter mood—a mood which would make the discovery, which she felt to be on the eve of taking place, only yet more terrible.

Nearer and nearer he came; the gravel crackled and grated beneath his foot as he stepped. She saw his shadow fall on the grass where they were standing like statues, breathless and erect—not crouching, though that might have been the more fitting attitude for them.

Nearer still and nearer moved the shadow toward them. She felt cold and sick.

Another moment the Marquis stood before her, and turned his face to her.

A wild, maddened shriek trembled upon her lips, but ere it could quit them the Marquis turned his face away and passed on beyond them out of their sight.

They had looked out from a spot obscured by deep shadows, and they saw him with horrifying distinctness; he looked into darkness, and saw—nothing.

He was naturally near-sighted, and his eyesight was not so good now as it had been. The obscurity into which he gazed, into which, indeed, he seemed to peer with a penetrating look, was a mere void, a blank blackness.

Still another footstep, accompanied by the rustle of a dress.

A moment more, and the Marchioness' maid, Fare, appeared.

She, too, looked into the obscurity, and started—she placed a finger upon her lips, and passed on.

She had seen him. She knew that the Earl was in the garden, for she had given Nat a key of one of the gates for him, but she did not know the precise spot in which he had secreted himself. She was very anxious, however, to discover it, for she had a fear that, if the Earl were to be found in the garden, when the subsequent investigations took place she would be implicated in the affair, and punished in some awful manner.



Now she knew the spot, and the fact that the Earl and the Marchioness were together, she resolved to conduct the Marquis in such a direction that he would not only not return to the place where they were concealed, but that she would drive him off the scent altogether.

She, therefore, talked to him in rather a loud tone of voice, which he reproved, but without effect, and Constance and Bertram were therefore enabled to tell, by the sound of her voice, the direction the Marquis was taking, and how far he was from them.

It was a narrow escape, and they both knew it to be such; and when the sound of Fane's voice died away, they both drew a deep breath of relief.

Impulsively the Earl drew her to his breast, and passionately embraced her. For a moment she yielded her form to the pressure of his encircling arms; and then, with a hoarse cry, she broke away from him, and burying her face in her hands, she stood shuddering.

He would once more have twined his arms about her waist, and have breathed soft accents in her ear, but she passionately flung his hand away, drew herself up erect, and faced him.

"Let me pass," she said, in unsteady tones, though she would fain have spoken with firmness and decision. "We have already incurred a dreadful risk, do not let us provoke Fate."

"No!" he responded; "for years I have sought to conciliate Fate, and have failed. I am prepared now to dare and defy it. You cannot leave me until we have at least cleared up one strange mystery, still existing between you and me, between whom there should be no secrets. I have spoken to you respecting your illness at Beachborough Abbey—"

"Bertram!" she cried, excitedly; "from the first moment we met, you have been selfish to the last degree. Mercilessly so. Show me some mercy now, and let me leave you."

"I cannot—nay, I will not!" he cried, with closed teeth; "not if Westchester were here, and demanded you from me. I must, and I will know the truth of this strange matter, and from your lips."

"You will drive me frantic!" she exclaimed.

"I am desperate," he returned, with a kind of stern ferocity.

"You make me desperate, too," she uttered, in a low tone, which curiously resembled his own.

"Be it so. It is well that we should know each other's mood," he answered. "Speak; I have put to you a question—answer it!"

"What question?" she demanded, with an expression, and in a voice he did not like.

"I have told you, that you, while suffering from an attack of illness, proceeded to Beachborough Abbey."

"I have not denied that."

"And that while there—"

"You will repent, Bertram, having subjected me to this humiliating examination."

"I will repent nothing, but having suffered you to leave me, to enter upon, and to drag me with you, into this most damnable drama, in which we have acted the principal characters!" he cried, evidently deeply excited. "I insist upon your answering me, and doing so truthfully."

"Proceed!" she answered, in an icy tone.

"I tell you, that while at Beachborough Abbey you were delivered of a child—our child, Constance. Speak, I entreat you; this is true, is it not?"

"It is not!" she returned, emphatically, but with bitter coldness.

He started back from her amazed.

"Not true!" he repeated, with an astounded air.

"It is not true," she answered, firmly.

"You confound me," he ejaculated, with almost breathless wonder. "Why, I have not only received this tale from authority which I have a right to consider undoubted, but I have seen—seen—Constance, with my own eyes—"

"I care neither for your authority, what you have heard, nor what you have seen," she responded, in the same frigid tone, enforced and sustained with a singular power. "My authority, at least, ought to have the greatest weight with you." "But I have proofs," he urged.

Her lip curled with its wondrous scornful expression.

"Proofs?" she iterated. "Where are they?"

"The girl Shelley, your foster-sister, was with you at the time of your confinement," he rejoined. "She afterward had the child in her custody, and—"

The Marchioness waved her hand.

"If you are bent on immediate destruction, I am not!" she said, sternly. "It is my intention immediately to leave you; and while I despise your threats, I will dare all your efforts to stay me—"

"Constance! Constance!" he cried, deprecatingly, "this is not the tone in which you should speak to me—"

"Listen to me," she said, sternly and impatiently, apparently not heeding his pleading tone. "Since you appear so deeply interested in this story, I will reveal circumstances to you, and to you only—to you, because I feel that you are the only being living who has the shadow of a claim to demand of me the surrender of what I have hitherto retained as a profound secret, locked up in my own breast. I was ill soon after we were married, I admit. Was it strange? I was a young girl, scarcely emancipated from school, the heroine of a secret marriage, bound to keep that secret unknown to every one, save those who were active parties to it. It was natural that my mind should be troubled by the responsibility which I had incurred, and that the harassing anxiety, increased by your apathy and your growing indifference to me—"



"No, Constance, not indifference!"

"What matters it, if it assumed that sentiment so closely in appearance that it was not impossible for me to accept it for anything else? I fell into a nervous, desponding state, a condition of depressive debility, which soon became perceptible to my parents, who instantly sought advice. A change of scene was recommended. I selected Beachborough Abbey, and I gave you truthful reasons for that choice, although now you spurn them—"

"No—I wish only to know—"

"The truth; you shall have it," sharply responded the Marchioness. "I went to Beachborough Abbey, and while there I made the unhappy discovery that poor—poor Fanny—poor—"

The Marchioness covered her face suddenly with her handkerchief, and sobbed violently, passionately, for a minute.

At that moment, she remembered with an agony so intense, so acute, that all attempts to describe it would be puerile, that Fanny Shelley had sacrificed her life for her, and that she was about to repay that devotion—how?

The Earl gazed upon her with surprise and distress: He did not, however, attempt to interfere with this severe ebullition of emotion; he let it hold its sway unchecked. He knew the nature of Constance, indeed, too well to attempt any interference with her while thus moved; he, therefore, remained motionless and silent.

The unexpected burst of weeping passed away almost abruptly as it came. She, with an angry, impatient hand, removed the traces of her tears from her eyelids, and turned her white face to him.

"You will pardon my weakness," she said, in a voice which still needed firmness of tone; "Fanny Shelley was my foster-sister. She was humble and dependent, but faithful to—to a degree. You, Bertram, may bear testimony to that virtue which she possessed."

"I do, with my whole heart!" he cried, warmly. "I only deeply regret her death."

The Marchioness abruptly turned her back to him.

There was a dead silence for an instant; then Constance moved slowly round, and faced him again.

"She was my foster-sister," she resumed, evidently speaking with some difficulty; "and she was the only woman I ever loved!"

She paused again. And then, as if by a desperate effort, she proceeded with more firmness and some rapidity:

"She loved me with a devotion I have no words to describe, and she was so attentive to my wishes, so thoughtful of my wants, so ready to serve me in any way, at any moment, that it was not possible for me to help being attached to her. She accompanied me to Beachborough; I saw that she, too, was ill—very ill—very dejected—indeed, very unhap-

py. I questioned her closely, and at last she confessed to me that she had been pursued by a young nobleman, one of your class, Bertram; that, after having for some lengthened period withstood his importunities, his professions of love, and his wildly-uttered never-to-be-redeemed promises—for she had a lover prepared to marry her, whenever she chose to assent—she in some unhappy moment fell, and she was then about—to become—a mother."

She paused, and breathed deeply.

Then she subjoined rapidly:

"What more would you have me to say, Bertram? A child was born; I assisted her to keep this secret, this terrible misfortune. The infant was conveyed away from Beachborough without discovery. We returned to London. I found you more careless, more indifferent to me than ever. Nay, it is useless to interrupt me. I know what I saw and what I felt. I need not refer to what followed. You know why I parted with Fanny Shelley. I settled an income on her, and we parted forever. The poor, misguided, foolish girl, after quitting me, returned to Beachborough to her parents, and took her child with her. You appear to know what happened subsequently. For that error, and for all other unfortunate matters connected with it, I am, therefore, in no way responsible. I have finished. You now know what value to place upon the story you have heard, and in what light to look upon your informant."

She ceased, and looked at him furtively, but anxiously.

He returned her look with one of speechless wonder.

He had not previously doubted that Hagar Lot, whom, however, he had known under a very different name, had made herself, out of a desire for revenge, mistress of all the facts; and he would have declared so, but he could not give her up as his authority—his acquaintance with her would not bear inquiring into, certainly by Constance, and, therefore, he was unable to say to her, "Why, your own instrument, used for the disposal of the child, has revealed all to me?"

There was something, however, so very plausible, so very feasible in the statement of the Marchioness, that he felt strongly inclined to believe it, the more as he could not comprehend her motive in originally concealing the truth from him. Still, he could not hide from himself that the young lady whom he had seen at his own mansion bore a most remarkable resemblance to Constance—a resemblance so striking that it would be difficult to account for it in any other way than by a tie of affinity.

"I confess," he presently said, in a tone of slight hesitation, "that your explanation appears to me to be perfectly natural; for what motive, had it pleased Heaven to bless us with an offspring, could you have had in concealing the fact?"

"What motive, indeed?" she observed with-



out an effort to disguise the contemptuous curl of her lip.

"Because," he continued, thoughtfully, without noticing the expression of scorn upon her features, "although you had sound reasons for keeping that important circumstance hidden from the world, you had no reason whatever to disguise it from me."

"None whatever," she exclaimed, with the same disdainful glance.

"Yet," he added, with a perplexed look at her, "I have already had an interview with a young person who, I have reason to believe, is the child of whom we have been speaking."

"The child of Fanny Shelley," responded the Marchioness, in a somewhat fainter tone.

"Ah—well—yes, if I place faith in your assertion," he replied, still hesitating; "but she bears such an extraordinary resemblance to you."

"To me?"

"To you, Constance—a most remarkable likeness," he returned, speaking in an impressive manner.

"Are you sure?" she exclaimed, with a curl of scorn still upon her lip.

"How could I be mistaken?" he answered, elevating his eyebrows. She is young, tall, beautifully formed, and with a most graceful carriage—such, indeed, as you were when I first met with and was entranced by you."

"Flattery from your lips, Lord Brackleigh, is embarrassing to me," she observed, with a sneer which made him wince; "in what you may further have to communicate to me, I beg of you to avoid it."

He reddened and bowed.

"I intended to say that she is, in feature and form, the counterpart of what you were when we first met," he subjoined. "She has the same shaped features, the same colored eyes and hair, even the tone of her voice resembles yours in its intonation."

"A coincidence," remarked the Marchioness, impatiently. "Fanny Shelley was passionately attached to me. I was, I may almost say, her sole thought; that her child should be like me, is surely not so astonishing!"

"But her air, her mien, her carriage?" he urged.

Her father was a nobleman," exclaimed the Marchioness, turning away from him with a vexed and impatient manner.

He looked at her earnestly, and then said, questioningly:

"I am to believe you, I suppose, Constance?" She turned abruptly to him.

"To me," she said, "that is a matter of indifference now. You have been pleased to affect some degree of ardent attachment for me; yet my word, in a matter in which you admit yourself I cannot possibly have any motive for concealment, you distrust. I therefore know not what value to set upon your protestations of unaltered affection."

"You have decided me, Constance," he exclaimed with a sudden emphasis. "I must have been a fool to doubt you. Nay, if I had

for an instance reflected, I, who know your nature so well, might have been convinced that, whatever might have been the inducements, however powerful the reasons urging you, you would never have been guilty of consigning your poor little innocent babe to the mercy of strangers—to a life of vicissitude, penury, perhaps crime. Such barbarity would have been absolutely inhuman, and therefore it is not possible for you to have been its mother—"

"I am faint and weak—this conversation wearies and fatigues me beyond expression," she interrupted, with blanched cheeks and lips; "bring your remarks to a close, I entreat you, and let me depart."

"I will not much longer detain you," he replied. "Let me, however, assure you, that I fully believe your assertion, and that I have entire faith in you; and now let me close this part of the subject of our conference, by expressing my delight at finding the information which I had received respecting you to be false. Other communications, intended to have placed you in a horrible light, in my eyes, are unquestionably false; but as I can trace a motive to these assertions in a hatred of you, so I can now, with satisfaction to myself, despise them."

"Who is my assailant?" asked the Marchioness, eyeing him curiously.

He shrugged his shoulders, and answered evasively.

"One unworthy your notice. One word more—where do you imagine that I met this child of Shelley's?"

She started, and darted upon him in an eager look of inquiry.

"I cannot imagine," she replied, hastily.

"Where?"

He smiled strangely, as he answered.

"In my own house."

She recoiled from him with amazement.

"Even in Brackleigh Mansion," he continued. "I found her there accidentally, in a room adjoining my study. She was attired in a costume precisely similar to that worn by you when you sat for a miniature of yourself, painted for me, and which I still have. On entering the room, she looked up at me. I was never so startled in my life; for an instant I was carried back years, and I even believed it was yourself whom I was addressing."

Her lips moved, but no sound issued from them.

"Yes, Constance—would you suppose it, this child, so remarkable in its history, is now a protegee of Lady Brackleigh?"

"Of Lady Brackleigh!" she murmured, faintly. "How—how could she possibly have fallen under her notice?" she gasped.

"Well, in truth, I cannot answer that question," he returned, musingly. "There has been something very odd in Lady Brackleigh's manner, and in her movements, since we first met, after our double marriage, at Maddrassfield Castle, when, oddly enough, we



were introduced to each other. She has from that time acted independently of me, and in frequent defiance of my wish ; but, as I never cared a straw for her, I never perservered in any opposition to her whims."

"Her whims," repeated Constance, with an increased pulsation of the heart, "what form did those whims take?"

She was thinking of Floret's presence in Brackleigh Mansion when she put that question.

"A desire to move about the country, in any direction she thought fit, without consulting me. I happened to decide upon going to Wiltshire at one period—you remember when ; upon my return, I found that she had been to Wiltshire too. I know not what part, but there she had been, although she said that she had been to some other place. I met her, too, once very unexpectedly at Brighton."

"At Brighton!" ejaculated the Marchioness, abruptly.

"Ah!" rejoined Bertram, thoughtfully, "that reminds me of the singular remarks she made to me when she entered the room, while I was speaking to the child of—"

"Yes, yes, I know," interposed the Marchioness, impatiently.

"By the way," he said, abruptly, "I had for the moment forgotten the name which this peculiar child has adopted. What do you imagine it to be?"

"I cannot conceive" returned Constance, hardly able to force out the words.

"Edith Plantagenet!" he answered.

She looked at him incredulously.

"It is impossible. You have been imposed upon," she said, hoarsely, without knowing what fell from her lips.

"O, but I had it from her own lips," he replied, quickly. "Of course, the moment I beheld her I requested her to give me her name. I was greatly excited by her resemblance to you, and when she informed me that it was Edith Plantagenet, you may imagine what my emotions were. It was natural that I should then imagine that a child of my own stood before me, of whose existence I had previously no knowledge, nor even any conception."

"She has no right to bear that name. She shall not. I will tear it from her!" exclaimed the Marchioness, quivering and trembling with excessive emotion.

"Calm yourself, Constance," said Bertram, assuming a soft tenderness of tone ; "it shall be my task to prevent her troubling you any more."

"If you do this, you will have a claim to my everlasting gratitude," she exclaimed, with an eager fervor which had an instant influence over him.

"You have said sufficient, Constance, to compel me to win that gratitude," he replied, with enthusiasm. "I will, on my return home, strip the jay of her feathers, and order her to be removed from my mansion. I am at least master there."

"Does your—does Lady Brackleigh know aught of our early connection, Bertram?" she asked, abruptly, but in an earnest tone.

"Nothing certain, I believe," he said, in reply ; "but she suspects, that's clear."

"The truth?" inquired the Marchioness.

"Judge!" he returned. "When she joined me while conversing with Edith, Shelley's—"

"Name her not, but proceed. I know whom you mean," exclaimed the Marchioness, passionately.

"Even so," he rejoined. "Well, Constance, while I was speaking with her, Lady Brackleigh joined us. She, with considerable excitement, bade me look on the girl's face, and as she did so she informed me that she was born at Beachborough in thirty-three, and she requested me to remember how I passed the fifth of December, eighteen hundred and thirty-two, at Brighton."

"It is the very day!" ejaculated the Marchioness. "She must know all!"

"I believe she does," rejoined the Earl.

"The time for action, therefore, has come. Will you wait quietly here while the net is drawn tightly over, so that escape will be impossible? or, Constance, will you dare the world's criticism, and, relying upon my undying love—"

A shadow fell across them as he uttered those words, and a rapid footstep approaching compelled him to suspend his speech.

Another moment Fane stood before them.

"May it please your ladyship," she said, in swift tones, and evidently greatly flurried, "the Marquis seems in great uneasiness of mind about your ladyship. My Lord wishes to see your ladyship, and he has been searching in every direction for you. I have conducted him to every place I could think of, but he is not satisfied ; he will search the garden again. I said I thought your ladyship might be in the summer-house ; there is the key of it, your ladyship. The Marquis is coming this way now, Sir. Behind this tree there is a long strip of grass ; there is a door in the wall a little way down ; it leads into another garden. Your servant is there waiting to show you a way out where nobody will notice you. O my Lady, the Marquis isn't twenty yards from this part!"

The Marchioness moved hastily away.

"I shall know how to communicate with you," whispered the Earl, as he pressed her hand, and darted behind the tree, taking the direction which Fane had given.

Fane returned to meet the Marquis and accompany him to the summer-house. Her pretence for leaving him was that she had to find the key of the summer-house. She intended to inform him, on reaching him, that it was not to be found.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

"Plead with the swift frost  
That should spare the eldest flower of spring;  
Plead with a wakening earthquake, o'er whose couch  
Even now a city stands, fair, young, and free;  
New stench and blackness yawn, like death. O plead  
With famine, or wind-walking pestilence,  
Blind lightning, or the deaf sea—not with man!  
Cruel, cold, formal man! righteous in words,  
In deeds a Cain." —SHAKESPEARE.

When the Earl of Brackleigh had discovered the door described to him by Fane, the attendant of the Marchioness, he found it ajar. He pushed it gently open, and passing through the doorway, he saw Nat standing in an expectant attitude, awaiting his coming.

"The way out. Quick!" exclaimed the Earl, in rapid, but low accents.

Nat touched his hat, and with light but nimble steps struck down a narrow path along a kitchen-garden, and thence, through a second door, into a stable-yard of somewhat considerable dimensions.

He glanced hastily round him, but there appeared to be nobody about, and he proceeded on cautiously, but hastily, until he conducted the Earl abruptly into a busy thoroughfare.

The Earl instantly engaged a street-cab, and returned to Brackleigh Mansion. On reaching it, he proceeded direct to his study, and, throwing himself on a couch, he proceeded to collect his thoughts.

He felt greatly elated at having seen the Marchioness. He had not been startled, as he somewhat anticipated, by the inroads which time had made upon her appearance. She was still fair and beautiful, with a complexion that seemed quite transparent, and a mien that an empress might have envied.

The charms with which a heated imagination had invested her did not disappear, when he turned his eager eyes upon her face and form. He saw that she was changed, indeed, from the young, slight, proud, almost child-like girl, whose step had the grace, the lightness, and the elasticity of that of a fawn; but the features which he had recognized and admired in her girlhood seemed only now to have become matured. Care, it is true, was imprinted on her face; but that served, in his eyes, to endow her with a spiritual look, which increased rather than detracted from her loveliness.

In truth, the interview had not had the effect of weakening the passion which, of late years, had been fostered by memory and imagination only; on the contrary, it had confirmed all his speculations, and rendered his desire to be reunited to her fiercer than ever.

He went carefully, thoughtfully, and as calmly as he could, over all the topics which had been discussed at their recent interview, and he believed that their consideration conducted him to a proper understanding of the position in which he was placed, and the hazards which beset and surrounded the path he was bent upon taking.

The result of his reflections was a determination to realize as much money as he could

from his personal property, place his affairs and estates in the hands of a shrewd, firm, legal man of business, and when that was done, to apprise the Marchioness of his arrangements, and elope with her to Norway; or some place which had not completed with England an extradition treaty.

He decided, upon reflection, not to communicate with Constance until he had matured his plans, and they were on the eve of accomplishment. He had the sharpness to comprehend that it would be his most prudent step to make a confidant of no person, and he designed to hint, rather than to say openly to the solicitor whom he intended to employ, that he desired the affairs intrusted to him should be carried out swiftly and secretly.

The Marchioness had successfully convinced him that Floret was not his child, and he determined to contrive an interview with the latter on the following morning, to disabuse her mind of any impression to that effect, if she entertained it. He had no doubt that, by some casual, but yet extraordinary accident, the Countess had discovered her, and, struck by her resemblance to Constance, had, like her sex, immediately leaped to a conclusion that she was her child—and his. Impressed by this conceit, he thought it not unnatural that she should secure possession of Floret until she could place herself in a position to prove that her suspicions were correct, and he resolved, by an appeal to the girl's common sense, as he expressed himself mentally, to convince her of the wildness of the Countess's conjecture, and to point out to her the impropriety of remaining a moment longer beneath his roof, as she had heard from his lips a positive denial of paternity, either in the case of the Marchioness or of himself.

He summoned Nat, and bade him ascertain whether a young lady who had been staying with the Marchioness on a visit was yet with her.

Nat, who had an eye to business, and that "stunning public", had already assured himself of that fact, and was employing every stratagem he could devise to obtain a few minutes' conversation with her alone. The Countess had, as yet, been too sharp for him; that is to say, her maid, who had, from Nat's first arrival at Brackleigh Mansion, entertained the strongest suspicion of his integrity, and had nourished an instinctive aversion to him, was, in the interests of her mistress, too sharp for him.

She had detected him prowling about the Countess's suite of apartments, and she kept her eyes constantly upon him, so that he could not make his appearance in any spot where he thought it likely Floret might appear unaccompanied by any one, but he found her at his elbow.

He was, therefore, in a position to immediately give to the Earl the information for which he had asked. On receiving it, the Earl immediately rejoined:



"Ascertain to-morrow morning whether the young lady of whom I have been speaking enters the sitting-room which adjoins the library; the moment she does so, acquaint me with it."

Nat was delighted with these instructions, because he thought it would give him a right to be moving about in that part of the mansion where Subtle was perpetually crossing him and snubbing him for being there. With a very decided intention of keeping his promise, he assured the Earl that the young lady should not enter "that 'ere" room without his being promptly informed of the fact.

In the morning he was early astir; so was Subtle, and she wanted to know why he kept on "poking his nose where he hadn't ought to" at that early hour of the day.

Chawing a small piece of straw, he answered, with an air of the coolest confidence:

"Ax the hurl."

She looked at him steadfastly and penetratingly, but his was not a countenance quite so guileless that any one could read upon his cheek what was passing in his brain. She, therefore, retired, and informed the Countess of what had transpired, with her own opinions thereon.

The Countess reflected for a few minutes, and then determined to see Nat herself, and put him through a course of examination. She made no reply to Subtle, but abruptly quitted the room, and pounced suddenly upon him before he could avoid her, which he certainly would have done if the slightest chance had presented itself.

A few brief, rapid questions, sternly put, compelled Nat to confess that the Earl had ordered him to watch the appearance of Floret in the sitting-room which adjoined the library. The Countess, on hearing this, mused for a minute or so, and then said to him:

"When the clock strikes eleven, proceed to his lordship and inform him the young lady with whom he desires to have some conversation is in the room in which he previously met her. Beware how you inform him that you obtained this information through me."

As she concluded, she retired as hastily as she had appeared.

Nat felt certain disagreeable misgivings steal into his mind, although he could not quite see what he had to apprehend; he, however, soled himself with a belief that there would be a good opening for him to say a few words to Floret alone, before he communicated to the Earl the intelligence that she was in the sitting-room in which he expected to see her.

He had no doubt that Floret was the child of the Earl of Brackleigh and the Marchioness of Westchester; and now that she was actually beneath the roof of her father, he resolved to disclose to her the secret of her birth, assure her that he was the only person living who could prove it, and that at the proper moment he would come forward and do so, if she

would bind herself down to pay him, as soon as she had obtained through his instrumentality her rights, the fancy sum of ten thousand pounds, that being the purchase of the said "public" which was ever running uppermost in his brain—a sum which he was satisfied would be a mere "milk-score" to her when she had got her own.

A few minutes before eleven he glided with stealthy step along the corridor to the door of the room in which he believed Floret to be now sitting, and he cautiously turned the handle of the lock, that he might enter the apartment noiselessly, but though the handle turned readily enough, the door would not open. After three or four attempts, made with the application of as much strength as he dared use, he came to the mortifying conclusion that the door was locked upon the inside.

While reflecting upon what was to be done now, whether it would be advisable to tap gently at the door or not, he heard the rapid step and the rustle of the dress of a female approaching him. He took five or six enormously long strides from the door, and turning round with his hands in his pockets, he assumed a sauntering gait, and moved slowly back in the direction he had just quitted.

The female overtook and passed him; it was Subtle. She turned her head round and grinned in his face, and went on, singing, loud enough for him to hear:

"A watchman I am, and I know all the round  
The housekeepers, the strays, and the lodgers."

Nat could not find a satisfactory response to this unpleasant allusion, and he, therefore, let her depart without an observation, which, at another time, would indubitably have followed her. He saw that it would not be possible to carry out his intention at present; he therefore decided to defer it to a more favorable opportunity, and he believed, with his vigilance, that it would soon offer itself.

The clock struck eleven, and he went direct to the Earl, whom he found awaiting him impatiently in his library. He rose from his seat as Nat entered, and looked at him angrily. He was about to address him in a sharp, reproving tone, when Nat jerked with his thumb, and gave a side nod with his head toward the door at the farther end of the apartment.

"Is she there?" inquired the Earl, in a whisper.

Nat nodded, but remained mute.

"Be within call when I ring for you," added the Earl; and turning away, strode down the library.

"I ought to ha' performed on that ere door, I ought," thought Nat, as he watched the Earl move toward it. "An' that's jes' what I will do when the Hurl's a-thinkin' what sort of a mornin' it is to-morrer about this time."

The Earl looked back, and Nat disappeared from the library instantan.

On reaching the door which led into the



sitting-room, the Earl turned the handle with a gentle touch, and opened it softly; he gazed within, and beheld Floret standing near to a window, with her face turned toward him, for she was attracted by the sound of the opening door.

As before when he saw her, the light fell upon her face and the upper part of her form. He started, and his blood seemed to run back to his heart.

A strange faintness seized him, for the resemblance of Floret to Constance was so surprisingly great that nothing whatever appeared to be left to the imagination to supply.

He had seen the latter so recently, had gazed so earnestly and so searchingly at every feature, that they were stamped with the greatest fidelity upon his memory; and as he looked upon Floret's face, he saw their counterpart in every particular.

The likeness, indeed, was so great that, as a coincidence, it was little short of a miracle. He had never examined any theory which obtained the power of mind over matter; but he thought that the affection of Fanny Shelley for Constance must have been very intense, and her devotion to her of the most absorbing character, to have produced such a remarkable result.

But Constance had positively affirmed to him that this girl was not her child, and he felt bound to believe her, although his common sense strongly urged him to doubt whether such a resemblance as he saw before him could have been produced by a simple though continuous action of the mind. Still, he decided that it would be the safer and the wiser plan for him to place faith in her word. Under existing circumstances, it would certainly not be politic for him to act as if he had not the most implicit confidence in her; and although he was absolutely staggered by the appearance of Floret, he, in defiance of an instinctive impression to the contrary, resolved to regard her as the offspring of Fanny Shelley, and to treat her accordingly.

So, by an effort, recovering herself, he put on a demeanor of cold composure, he advanced toward her, and bowed stiffly.

He commenced with an icy—

"Good morning, Madam!"

She felt his accents fall cold upon her heart.

She had the day before been inspired in his favor; his handsome features and form, his elegance of manner, impressed her agreeably, and she was moved by the emotion he displayed. Perhaps there was some secret influence at work which she did not take into account.

The Countess had prepared her for an interview with him half an hour previously, and she certainly made arrangements to keep it with no disinclination.

She permitted the Marchioness' maid, Subtle, to dress her as she pleased, she only took some care that her hair and her dress were arranged with exquisite nicety, and according to her own taste.

She had anticipated, she did not know why,

that this morning's interview would, in its conduct and in its result, be more pleasing and satisfactory to her than the first. But she was wofully chilled by the manner and the tone of the Earl when he first addressed her.

She bowed only in reply; but she looked somewhat eagerly and questioningly at him.

He could not fail to see that his cold reserve had had a discouraging effect upon her, and he, therefore, averted his eyes from her face, for he felt that he could not trust himself to look upon her and preserve a frigid bearing toward her.

"I have sought you this morning," he went on to say, "to have a little conversation with you, that I may set you right upon a few things in which you have been deceived. Upon one matter, at least, in which you have been grossly misled."

She slightly inclined her head as she paused; but she did not speak.

"I allude to your name," he subjoined.

She started, and gazed upon him with surprise and some little dismay.

"You told me," he continued, "if my memory is not treacherous, that your Christian name was Edith."

A flash of crimson flew over her cheeks, she bowed her head—drooped it rather—assentingly.

"And your surname Plantagenet."

She did not reply.

He glanced at her; her face had become as white as death.

She looked exactly as he had seen the Marchioness look the night before.

He drew a deep breath.

"What if the Marchioness has deceived me!" he thought, and then he impatiently dismissed the idea. "It is impossible," he murmured. "She could have no motive whatever, when that birth took place, to keep the secret from me."

"I have no doubt," he continued, addressing Floret, after a short silence, "that you have had nothing to do with the assumption of that name—for it is an assumption, let me assure you of that; and I have no doubt in the world that the name you bear was given to you with a dishonest motive—a motive which had for its intention the injury of a high-born lady, without providing any benefit or advantage to you. Nay, its exposure would have been calculated to very seriously damage you."

He saw that her face was still overspread with a ghastly paleness, and he could not keep down an emotion of pity for her situation; he therefore somewhat changed the tone of his voice, though he still retained a distant manner.

"The name of Edith Plantagenet belonged to a lady to whom you are in no degree related," he said; "but I think I can explain how it was bestowed upon you, and for what reason. Remember, there is no person living who can furnish you with the facts connected with your origin so faithfully or so truthfully



as myself. The source from whence I obtained my information is beyond question, and, indeed, some of the circumstances I myself remember distinctly."

He paused for a minute, as if to watch what effect his observations were having upon her, and he perceived that she was listening to him, as one who had been full of hope of escape from a hateful bondage listens to a judge passing sentence of death.

Again a strange thrill of compassion ran through his frame, and he modulated his voice into a still kinder tone than before.

"I am aware," he resumed, "that my communication cannot be otherwise than painful to a susceptible mind; still it would, I am sure, be the most mistaken tenderness for your feelings were I to suffer you to continue to cherish a delusion which sooner or later must bring upon you grief and humiliation. If, therefore, I speak plainly, do not understand me to speak harshly, or suppose me to be animated by any unmanly desire to pain or wound you unnecessarily. Having thus prefaced my intended statement, let me revert to what was said in my hearing to you by the Countess of Brackleigh, who has taken upon herself, very improperly, very wrongly, very cruelly, I will say, to be your patroness. She referred to your resemblance to the Marchioness of Westchester, whose maiden name was Plantagenet. Well, I confess that you do resemble that lady, and in a very striking degree; and here I may suggest that your history and your extraordinary resemblance to a lady of high rank and birth lies in a nutshell. Lady Westchester had a foster-sister, by name Shelley."

Floret, with faint eyes, glanced around her. O for some mode of escape from her terrible position, for the very name of Shelley made her anticipate some disclosure that would crush her. But every outlet was secured, and there was no help for her but to listen.

She drooped her eyelids over her eyes, so that their long, fair, silken lashes rested upon her cheek; she clasped her hands tightly, and stood erect—to the Earl it seemed haughtily and defiantly.

Ah, if he could have only read what was passing in her mind, and how every word he was uttering served as a weapon to break her heart, he would have ceased speaking on the mention of the name of Shelley, and left unsaid that which, while it was unqualifiedly false, brought back again to her her old hopeless despair.

But he saw nothing but the accomplishment of his own designs; and though he knew that he was inflicting grievous pain, he had no notion of permitting her to remain in doubt upon a point of which at least he comprehended the importance.

"I remember Shelley well," he continued; "she was a very pretty, quiet, unassuming girl, born of humble parents; but she was, as I have said, the foster-sister of Lady Westchester; and as her ladyship in childhood

had taken a violent fondness for her, she was brought up with her. Lady Westchester was very kind to her, exceedingly kind; indeed, I believe, she quite loved her—a—with a—such love as can exist between a superior and a dependent. In consequence, as may be imagined, Shelley worshiped her. Well, to make a long and painful story short, some individual in a similar position to my own—a man of birth, I believe—saw Shelley, was struck by her pretty face, courted her, betrayed her, there is no doubt about that. Lady Westchester, while at Beachborough, suffering under indisposition, discovered her secret and preserved it for her. A child was born whose features marvelously resembled those of the then Miss Plantagenet. This physiological fact may be accounted for as a piece of mind-worship by the maid of the mistress. The child—a—the—a—to be brief, you were that child; your name, therefore, is not only not Edith Plantagenet, but is not, and cannot be any other than Shelley."

The Earl of Brackleigh, who at the moment was speaking with some little embarrassment, owing to the delicacy of the communication he considered himself compelled to make, had his eyes fixed upon a superb diamond ring of great value, was startled by a heavy fall.

The sound was followed by a slight shriek from a further corner of the room.

He looked up. Upon the floor, senseless, lay Floret. Advancing from the shadow of an Indian screen, which stood at the end of the apartment, he saw the Countess of Brackleigh flying to her aid.

She knelt down and raised the poor broken-hearted girl from the floor, and supported her upon her knee. She turned her face up to the Earl:

"Your coarse brutality, your atrocious, wicked falsehoods have slain her," she cried, with deep and angry emotion.

"Madam!" he ejaculated, sternly.

"Leave the room," she cried, vehemently.

"Leave it, unless you wish your servants to witness a scene such as they will never forget, and you may repent as long as you breathe!"

"You are mad," he replied, in an offended tone.

"It would be no wonder if I were," she replied, scarcely able to articulate from excessive excitement. "I am, however, sane enough to counteract your infernal machinations, and I will. You may plot as you will, but my counterplot shall destroy your schemes, and you, too!"

"Lady Brackleigh," he cried, fiercely, "you presume upon your position."

"And upon my right, if I presume at all," she answered, in an excited but determined tone. "Quit the room, I command you, or I will summon the servants, and repeat to them what I now say to you. I will expose your deliberate and iniquitous falsehoods to this poor, ill-used girl—your child—O inhuman wretch—whom you have thus savagely de-



ceived, ay, and traduced, for she is as legitimately born as your own mother."

"Lady Brackleigh," cried he, passionately "It is not my name, and you know it," she retorted, wildly; "ay, and you will have to answer for that, as well as for your treatment of this poor, innocent creature. You lied to me, as treacherously and as foully as you have just done to her, and you shall not—you cannot escape retribution."

"I will not submit to these vulgar outrages," he exclaimed, biting his lips to suppress the impulses of the violent rage which was almost convulsing him. "You shall hear from me. I will not remain beneath the same roof with you."

He was about to leave the room, when she said to him, in slow, emphatic tone;

"Quit this house—or, quitting it, leave London if you dare. If you but attempt it, you will be arrested."

"Arrested!" he repeated. "Who will dare to take such a step?"

"A police-officer," she cried, vehemently, "upon a charge of bigamy, which I will support with proofs; and, at the same time, my Lord Marquis of Westchester shall have the opportunity of prosecuting a similar charge, unless he be too greatly attached to the wanton chains which have so long and so infamously held him in bondage. Now, go; do as you please, but be prepared for the consequences."

As she concluded, she made a desperate effort, and rose up with the still senseless form of Floret in her arms, and seizing a handbell, rung it with the greatest violence.

Startled by this movement, and positive that it would bring into the room several servants, whose surprised and questioning looks he had no inclination to face, he retreated hastily to his library, and thence to his study, there to reflect upon the new phase affairs had taken, and what would be his next best step.

In the meantime, Subtle had promptly answered the summons of Lady Brackleigh, and she quickly assisted to bear poor Floret into the private chamber of the Countess, where they laid her motionless form upon a couch, and applied restoratives to her.

It was long ere she recovered—long before she quite realized her position; then, when, after having gazed around her, having recognized the apartment, and the faces of Countess and Subtle, her maid, she remembered her interview with the Earl of Brackleigh, and what he had revealed to her, she commenced, without uttering a word, to take off the bracelets and necklet which the Countess—to render her resemblance to the miniature of the Marchioness of Westchester more complete—had induced her to wear.

The Countess checked her, and in a soothing tone, said:

"What would you do, my dear? Pause, consider."

Floret shuddered.

She had been considering, and she still per-

sisted in removing the jewelry with which she had been adorned.

The Marchioness laid her hand gently upon her arm. She turned to subtle, and said:

"Leave us for a minute or so, Subtle. I will ring for you when I want you again."

Subtle immediately quitted the room, and then the Countess, seating herself by the side of Floret, placed her arm about her waist.

"My dear child," she said, in a tender and encouraging voice, "be advised by me. Do not suffer what you have heard from Lord Brackleigh's lips to discourage you. He has the strongest possible motive for deceiving you, but we shall triumphantly refute him yet."

"I pray you, Lady Brackleigh, to permit me to leave your house," said Floret, in faint tones. "I am so utterly crushed—to remain here will only add to the agony I am already suffering."

"You shall suffer it no longer!" cried the Countess, rising. "I will at once produce to you an official copy of the certificate of the marriage between the then Viscount Bertram, under the name of Lennox Bertram, and Constance Neville, then Miss Plantagenet. You will see that there are various names attached to the document, and we will together hunt them all up, and as soon as we have procured all the necessary evidence, we will introduce you to the fashionable world as the legitimate daughter of two members of the highest and proudest families in this realm."

Floret said nothing, but she pressed her hands upon her throat as if she was suffocating.

Lady Brackleigh assisted her to rise, and conducted her into an inner apartment, a somewhat small room, fitted up with drawers, and book-cases, and cabinets.

To one of the latter she led Floret, and having produced a bunch of small keys, she applied one of them to the cabinet, and opened it; from the inside she drew forth a jeweled box, and unlocking it, she raised the lid.

It contained several papers, all of which she opened in turn, refolded and replaced.

She came to the last, and tore it open with trembling fingers, and gazed upon it with an expression of bitter disappointment. It was not the paper she sought.

For two hours she ransacked every case, drawer, cabinet, box, or secret place where a paper would be deposited in safety, but in vain. The copy of the certificate was not forthcoming.

"The villain has stolen it from me!" she exclaimed, with unconcealed rage. "But I will have back it again, and that in the course of a few hours!"

She turned to Floret, and said, with all the kindness she could press into the tone of her voice:

"Do not be disheartened, do not be discouraged, my poor child, all will yet go well. The document has, I am sure, been pilfered from me by the person from whom I received



it; but I will make him restore it, you may be assured. It will then be all the same, you know as if I produced it now. Cheer up your spirits, my dear child, we will bring these haughty wicked ones to our feet yet."

In faint and trembling tones, Floret put a few questions to the Countess, and elicited from her how she had originally obtained the copy of the certificate; that the original entry was not in the register-book, but had evidently been abstracted; and that, in short, she was not in possession of any positive evidence that her suppositions were facts.

On arriving at this conclusion, Floret's heart died hopelessly within her; she became more anxious than ever to depart; but the Countess told her, and with determination, too, that she should not leave her. She said she was as convinced of her legitimacy as she was of her parentage, and she would not permit her to quit her until she had established both.

Floret, as if powerless to struggle, appeared to yield, and in an hour or two seemed calmer, though still deeply depressed. She retired to her chamber early, on the plea of exhaustion, and begged not to be disturbed until a somewhat advanced hour in the morning.

The Countess acquiesced, and gave the necessary instructions to Subtle.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning when Subtle went to call Floret, and assist her to dress who had hitherto dressed herself.

She found her chamber untenanted.

Floret had resumed her own dress, and had disappeared.

The house was searched. No one had seen her depart. Every one, Nat included, denied having seen her quit her chamber or the house.

The Countess ordered her carriage, and drove direct to Mrs. Spencer's residence, at Pimlico; but, to her surprise and mortification, Floret had not returned there; they had not heard of her since she had left them.

The Countess waited until nightfall, but Floret did not come home. She returned to her own residence, and in answer to her inquiries, she was informed that Floret had not been seen during her absence.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!

Be thou a spirit!"

—SHAKESPEARE.

A week elapsed. No tidings of Floret had been obtained at Pimlico.

Ida was disconsolate, despairing, half frantic, because she did not know what to do to help to discover her friend. She was so utterly and completely ignorant of London and its labyrinths, that to proceed in search of Floret was to become lost herself. She could form no idea of what had become of her, save that she had several times intimated, when quite hopeless, that she would proceed to some secure place, and there, winning just enough bread to sustain existence, wear out her life in the deepest seclusion.

Whether that obscurity meant some purlieu in London, or some out-of-the-way spot in the country, she was unable to conjecture. She was unable, in fact, to afford any information which could direct the Countess where Floret was likely to be met with, or to furnish herself with a clue by which she could find her out and induce her to return to their comfortable apartments in Pimlico, or to join her, and to share her fate, whatever it might be.

The Countess, who found that her threat to the Earl had had the effect of keeping him in London, if not at home, found also that the Marquis and Marchioness of Westchester had quitted London for the country—what part of it, was a secret which was extremely well kept; for she had for years been mistress of the movements of the Marchioness, by the aid of spies in her household, and she was unable at present to learn whether they had gone.

So long as the Earl remained in London, she cared little what were the movements of the Marchioness, and this gave to her a kind of freedom to devote her energies to the prosecution of a search for Floret.

She lost no time in setting detectives to work. The Thames, the Serpentine, the ornamental waters in the Park were dragged; a circular was sent round to the various stations, and an advertisement was placed in the second column of the Times, describing the appearance and attire of a missing young lady; and a reward was offered for any information which might lead to her discovery.

Had it not been for the unhappiness which the mysterious disappearance of Floret had caused her, Ida would at this very period have been in the seventh heaven of delight, for among those who busied themselves greatly to attempt to discover what had become of Floret, was the Honorable Hyde Vaughan.

He seemed to be really anxious respecting her; for he made his appearance at Mrs. Spencer's every day—sometimes twice a day—and he felt bound each time to consult with Ida. It is true, she was unable to furnish him with any information which could help his investigations; but then she had always a suggestion or two to offer, out of which something might be made, and she was so eagerly desirous of knowing what success he had met with, and she looked so exceedingly charming in her excitement, that he found it impossible to suffer a day to pass away without calling to let her know how affairs were progressing, or to ask whether she had any new suggestions to make.

And she came to think him the kindest, gentlest, sweet-tempered, handsome, young, dear darling she had ever met in the course of her short life, or ever could meet with, if she lived ever so long.

And he thought her the prettiest and most fascinating creature he had ever known.

And that at the time was all he thought.

He had not the slightest intention of acting



dishonorably to her; but the idea of marrying her certainly never occurred to him.

It was a dangerous position for them both. Of the most earnest, unflagging, unwearied in the search of Floret was Lord Victor. His intimacy with Lady Brackleigh had increased since Floret had become her protegee. It had grown closer still after he, by accident, unknown to anybody, even Floret herself, had seen her in the habiliments which she had worn at the desire of the Countess, so that she might closely resemble the miniature of the Marchioness of Westchester.

That the glimpse from one of the reception-room windows which overlooked an apartment in which Floret was standing reading a book, had convinced him that, whatever might be her origin, she was the loveliest creature upon which his eyes had ever fallen.

And he thought that, supposing she were nameless, she could not be a more exquisite example of her Maker's work, nor more worthy if she were a born duchess.

He had learned to value his kind by their intrinsic worth. He attached no value to rank or appearance, which he knew were but contemptible frippery after all.

If ever man set himself to the accomplishment of a task with a determination to succeed, Lord Victor, in his resolve to find Floret, was the man.

He listened to all the Countess had to say about her, with the deepest attention. He had no doubt, after she had revealed everything to him, that Floret was the daughter of the Earl of Brackleigh and the Marchioness of Westchester, but that a marriage had taken place between the latter pair was to his mind doubtful—at least, he considered the evidence very inconclusive.

Still it was enough to deepen, if anything could, his interest in the poor, bruised, heart-broken girl.

He listened to all that Ida could tell him, and then he formed his plan of proceeding.

He had but one assistant in his service, and that was Mrs. Spencer's nephew, Bob, the publican, who, when requested by his aunt to aid in the search for the lost girl, replied, emphatically:

"I think so!"

A fortnight elapsed, and still no tidings, and every one grew very uneasy except Lord Victor and Bob; they kept up their search with unflagging spirit, and endeavored to inspire others with hope.

Neither Lord Victor nor Bob entertained any supposition that Floret had laid violent hands upon her life. Bob, in fact, made up his mind that the gipsies had got hold of her again; while Lord Victor, remembering what Ida had said, and impressed by Floret's own observation to him, that her lot henceforth must be lonely obscurity, was equally as certain that she had obtained apartments in a closely and densely-populated poor locality, where no one would dream of searching for her, and where she would be able to pass the

remainder of her life unregarded and unknown.

To search every such locality he applied his best energies. He was accompanied in his labors by Bob, and assisted in his searches by one of the ablest and most astute detectives belonging to Scotland Yard.

While he was thus employed, and the Countess of Brackleigh was engaged in endeavoring to ascertain whether Nat Ferret had robbed her of the copy of the certificate—which he stoutly denied—and was devising means to discover whether, in spite of his denial, he had it yet in his possession, her maid, Subtle, approached her, and informed her that a young woman was very desirous of speaking with her for a few minutes.

"Did she mention her business?" inquired the Countess.

"No, my Lady," replied Subtle.

"Nor give any name?" she asked.

"Yes, my Lady; she said her name was Mrs. Henry Vere," returned Subtle.

"I know no person of that name," observed the Countess, musingly.

"Not of that name," responded Subtle; "but I think you know the young woman. She was a dressmaker, who had something to do with that young lady who was here the other day—that is, when she was a child, and had the scarlet fever."

"I remember perfectly," exclaimed the Countess, quickly; "her name was Atten—Susan Atten; show her in instantly, Subtle. I will see her, to be sure I will see her."

Subtle disappeared, and in a minute or two re-appeared, followed by a young woman very genteelly dressed.

As soon as the Countess turned her eyes upon her, she exclaimed:

"I remember you—your name was Atten, was it not?"

"It was, my Lady" replied the young woman, "Susan Atten; it is now Vere. I am the wife of Henry Vere, who—"

"I remember," interposed the Countess; and said, kindly, "be seated. Subtle," she added, "be good enough to leave us."

Subtle quitted the room, and closed the door behind her with seeming readiness.

As she could, from a crevice which she had formed with patience and care in the adjoining room, hear all that was said in that in which the Countess and Susan were seated, it did not vex her to be sent out of the room.

As soon as they were alone, the Countess, eyeing Susan, said: "You have been abroad?"

"Yes, my Lady, to Canada," she replied.

"Ah! If I remember rightly, your present husband wrote for you to come over to him?"

"He did, my Lady, and I went over to him, and reached him and his friends safely," replied Susan.

"His friends," repeated the Countess, musingly; "his friends; let me see. What have I on my mind respecting his connections?"

"His brother, perhaps, my Lady," suggested Susan, rather faintly.



"His brother," echoed the Countess, reflectively. "How inactive my memory is! I have no recollections which point to the brother of the young man you went out to marry. Can you not aid my feeble brain?"

"His brother, my Lady," answered Susan, stammeringly, "was to—was to have married—the—the young woman—who lived at Beachborough—and who was supposed to have been—the—that is, she first brought to the village the Poor Girl—that is, I mean, my Lady—that child who was in my care—"

"I remember now!" exclaimed the Countess, abruptly, and with some little excitement. "His brother is the young man who was charged with the murder of the girl Shelley?"

"Yes, my Lady," returned Susan, still displaying embarrassment.

"And was he really guilty of that horrible crime?" she asked, looking searchingly at Susan's face.

A crimson flush suffused Susan's features, tears sprang into her eyes, and she replied, with a rather remarkable degree of earnestness: "He was not, my Lady; indeed, indeed he was not!"

"Circumstances were very strong against him," rejoined the Countess, eyeing her narrowly, "if I remember correctly what you yourself told me."

"Yes, yes, my Lady," returned Susan, with peculiar animation. "Yes, my Lady; but I was deceived by appearances, as all who lived in the village were."

"By appearances!" repeated the Countess, regarding her with a penetrating look. "Well, as I have said before, they looked so black against him that he was discharged only because no actual proofs could be produced against him. But no one, you said, thought him innocent!"

"No, my Lady; but they all wronged him!" exclaimed Susan, earnestly.

"What was his name?" asked the Countess, not for a moment removing her eyes from Susan's face.

"Stephen Vere, my Lady," replied Susan, trembling, as if she was under the cross-examination of an astute counsel, having committed some evil deed.

"You saw him in Canada?" said the Countess, interrogatively.

"Oh, yes, my Lady. It was upon his farm that my husband was living when I went to join him."

"Did his brother believe him to be guilty of the horrid crime?" asked the Countess, quickly.

"At first, perhaps my Lady; but—but afterward he knew him not to be!" returned Susan.

"Knew him not to be!" echoed the Countess, with a tone of surprise. "How could he know him not to be guilty?"

Susan remained silent, and cast her eyes upon the floor.

"I suppose he told him that he was not guilty, eh?" observed the Countess.

Susan raised her eyes; but she found those of the Countess so intently fixed upon hers that she dropped them again, and, in a confused tone, replied: "Yes, yes, my Lady."

The Countess shrugged her shoulders.

"That does not go very far to establish his innocence," she observed; and added: "You believed him guilty until you went to Canada, eh?"

"I—I—feared that he was so, my Lady!" she replied.

"But, upon reaching Canada, you discovered your error?" she pursued, rapidly.

"Yes; oh, yes, my Lady," returned Susan, with eagerness.

"How?" asked the Countess, sharply and emphatically.

Susan looked at her for an instant with something like affright, and, shrinking back a pace or two, burst into tears.

The Countess regarded her with almost intense interest.

She remained silent for a minute, and then said, in a softer tone than she had yet used:

"Compose yourself, my good girl. My object in putting the questions I have addressed and may submit to you, is one of importance. It can entail no injury to you, nor upon your connections, and may be the means of effecting a great result."

Susan wiped the tears from her eyes, and said, in a low voice:

"I am sure, my Lady, that goodness and kindness alone urge you to question me, and I hope you will pardon my foolish weakness; but the circumstances are all of them of the deepest and most painful interest to me, and when I think of what has happened, and what may yet happen, I cannot help being affected."

"I understand you," returned the Countess, readily; "and I will endeavor to avoid pressing too closely on any point which may pain you. The subject, however, is one in which I am as deeply interested as you are; nay, I am more nearly concerned than you can possibly be, and, therefore, I am compelled, as it were, to put questions to you, which, under other circumstances, an ordinarily-delicate consideration for your feelings would induce me to withhold."

"Yes, my Lady," returned Susan, quietly.

"You saw Stephen Vere, of course, on reaching his homestead," pursued the Countess.

"Yes, my Lady," replied Susan.

"Was he married?"

"No—no—no, my Lady."

"Had he a housekeeper?"

"His elder sister, my Lady."

"Ah—his eldest sister," repeated the Countess, with a tone of disappointment. Then she subjoined, "You conversed with him?"

"Yes, my Lady."

"Often?"

"Very often."

"You talked of old times when you knew each other at Beachborough?"



"Yes, my Lady."

"And of events which had taken place after he left England?"

"Yes my lady."

"And before he departed?"

This question was put with rapidity and marked emphasis.

"Yes, my Lady," replied Susan, with far more composure than the Countess expected to see her display; "we talked over everything that had happened both before and after he went away, my Lady."

"Without reserve?"

"Without any reserve whatever, my Lady."

"And you now firmly believe him to be innocent of the murder of the girl Shelley?"

"I am convinced of it, my Lady, as firmly as that I am here before you," replied Susan, with much earnestness.

"What brought you back to England?" inquired the Countess.

"The same cause which has induced me to come to you, my Lady," returned Susan. "I want to discover poor little Floret; or, as we knew her in the village, the Poor Girl, my Lady."

The Countess remained silent for a short period, endeavoring to peruse in Susan's features what was passing in her mind. Presently she said:

"Your husband has, of course, returned with you?"

"Yes, my Lady."

"And you have left his brother, the suspected, behind?"

"No, my Lady; he sold his farm, and has returned with us."

The Countess started.

"With you—then he is here in London?"

"Yes, my Lady."

"He was the last person at Beachborough who was known to have seen and spoken with Shelley alive, was he not?"

Susan's voice slightly faltered, as she replied:

"Ye—yes, my Lady."

"I must see him. You must not on any account permit him to quit London without giving me an interview."

"He will have no objection to give your ladyship an interview, I am sure."

"If I can proclaim and establish his innocence in Beachborough, I will; but he must render me some service in accomplishing the great object which I have been for years endeavoring to obtain."

"I do not doubt, my Lady, that he will be ready to render your ladyship any service which lies in his power," answered Susan, quietly.

"I am very delighted to hear you say so. I expect great help from him."

Susan shook her head slightly, as much as to insinuate that the Countess's anticipations would scarcely be likely to be realized. The Countess did not appear to heed this gesture, but asked:

"What is your address?"

"Little Elizabeth street, Pimlico, next door to the house in which I lived before I went away from England," she answered. "My old abode I found on my return occupied, and so we took the next house, in the hope that if Floret searched for us in that neighborhood she would be able to find us."

The Countess shook her head in her turn.

"Does your ladyship know where I can find her?" inquired Susan with eagerness, misconstruing her movement of the head into an intimation that Floret, perhaps, was too proud now to visit the humble street in which she had once lived with her.

Susan had always faith in the idea that the Poor Girl would become a great lady, and she seemed to have been long enough away from her own country for that event to have been now brought about.

"I wish I could tell you where you can find her," returned the Countess. "I do not know, and I am convinced that no one else but herself can furnish you with that information. Still, I hope shortly to be able to afford you the satisfaction of meeting with her. Had you arrived a fortnight or three weeks earlier, you would have met with her here."

"O mercy! here?" cried Susan, excitedly.

"In this room," returned the Countess.

Susan instantly rattled off fifty questions respecting her, which the Countess briefly answered.

"You will find her much changed," continued the Countess. "She has grown much, and is now a tall, elegant girl, with beautiful features, and a peculiarly lofty bearing."

"And pray, my Lady, does she resemble in the face any—any one great lady in particular?" inquired Susan, with undissembled agitation.

"She does, indeed," replied the Countess, eyeing her curiously, as if somewhat surprised by the question. "She bears the most extraordinary resemblance to the Marchioness of Westchester."

"Who—who—was a Miss Constance Plantagenet," exclaimed Susan, eagerly.

"The same individual," responded the Countess, with a curling lip.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Susan, clasping her hands.

"For what?" asked the Countess.

"For that news," replied Susan, with tears in her eyes. "O my Lady, you do not know—you cannot have any idea—how much there is attached to that fact!"

"I can guess," she exclaimed, dryly; and, looking at her watch, she added, "I have an engagement at hand which I must keep. I cannot, therefore, spare you any more time this morning; but I have your address, and the moment I obtain any tidings of Floret, as you call her—I know her by a different appellation—I will communicate with you; indeed, you may call at the place where she was living when I discovered her recently on your way home; they may have heard there something about her. Mention my name to the



person who keeps the house, and she will tell you anything which she may know, and much, probably, that will interest you. Good morning."

The Countess rang her bell; she gave Susan Mrs. Spencer's address; and, at the same moment, Subtle appeared at the door. Susan courtesied, and withdrew.

She hurried away toward Mrs. Spencer's abode, and as she was on the point of reaching it, she felt a touch upon her shoulder, and a voice exclaimed:

"I think so!"

She turned rapidly round.

"Bob!" she cried, quickly.

"Well, I think so, Susy," he returned; and they actually embraced in the street, without either knowing what they were about.

"How old is your sister!" said Bob, with a tremendously roguish twinkle of the eye.

"Don't be a fool, Bob," she cried, "but answer all my questions, and tell me everything you know."

Bob listened to her attentively, complied patiently, perseveringly, and with perspicuity.

When she had exhausted her questions, and him, too, she said:

"Now, Bob, come home with me, and see Harry."

"I think so," he said.

Arm-in-arm they made their way to Little Elizabeth street, and paused before the door of the house in which Susan now dwelt with her husband.

Susan opened the door with a key, and as Bob entered, she closed the door behind him.

She beckoned him to follow her up-stairs, and he did so, softly, because he observed that she stepped lightly.

On reaching the door of a front room, she opened it, and motioned him to enter.

He did so, with a chuckle, but instantly started, and recoiled a step.

His face became as white as death, he gasped for breath.

"My Lord!—my Lord!" he ejaculated.

Then there was a rush of blinding tears to his eyes, and he muttered, hoarsely:

"I—I—I think so!"

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

"Ye stars! which are the poetry of heaven,  
If in your bright leaves man would read the fate  
Of men and empires, it is to be forgiven  
That, in their aspirations to be great,  
Their destinies o'erstep their mortal state,  
For ye are a wonder and a mystery."

—BYRON.

Upon the night subsequent to the meeting of Hagar Lot with the Earl of Brackleigh, she stood alone with Liper Leper upon one of the wildest and most picturesque parts of Hampstead Heath.

The sun was setting with a stormy, angry aspect, and threw a fiery glare over the sandy hillocks and the patches of dark gorse, which assumed a rich purple tint in the fast fading light. The distant landscape had already merged into a deep blue misty haze of various

gradations of color, dotted here and there, and unevenly lined, indicating the masses of woodland and undulating ridges, which, in the broad daylight, were prominent and attractive features in the view.

To the eastward, where the sky was yet unobscured by the swiftly-rising, vapory clouds, the moon appeared—a thin silver crescent, only just visible. Below it a star was glittering brightly, and close to it, so that it seemed to touch, was another star, paler and brighter in its brilliancy.

Hagar stood with her back to the sun, watching those two stars with intense interest; and Liper Leper, with a gloomy gaze from beneath his bent brows, was occupied in regarding her yet beautiful countenance with fixed earnestness.

For a short time they stood without moving a limb, and perfectly silent, both intent on the exclusive object of their thoughts.

At length, the occultation of the faint star was completed, and Hagar, turning her face away, covered her eyes with her hands. Liper Leper removed his gaze from her face, and turned sullenly from her.

Hagar presently withdrew her hands from her face, and muttered:

"So it is accomplished!"

Liper moved his head slowly round, and bending his dark eyes upon her, asked, coldly:

"What is accomplished?"

"The star of my destiny is obscured by that of another," she replied.

Liper Leper cast his eyes upward to the star upon which she had been gazing.

"It is the star of the White Rose," he said.

"It is Floret's," she replied, gloomily.

"It shines more brightly than ever," he said, musingly.

"Yes," responded Hagar; and then, glancing at the sun, added, "a wild storm is brewing."

"Yet will it be higher and brighter in the heavens to-morrow," he returned, with a slow, marked enunciation; "and higher still, and higher and brighter, too, will it become. Do you know that, Hagar?"

She frowned, and with a malignant expression, replied:

"Her star has eclipsed my star to be itself eclipsed. Her race is nearly run."

"How know you that?" he asked, morosely.

"Why ask me when you have already assumed that I know her star to be in the ascendancy?" she answered. "I tell you, Liper," she added, after a moment's thought, "I know that as I know other events. I can read the mind of others as clearly as I can trace the paths of the planets, and interpret by their courses the shape that circumstances will take."

"Can you read my mind so clearly, Hagar?" he asked, in a half scornful tone.

"You shall know ere we part," she replied. "Before that takes place, I wish you



to heed me, and to add another service to the many which you have already performed for me."

He half turned gloomily from her.

Her eyes flashed brightly as she observed the gesture, and her lip slightly curled.

"It has been a long servitude, Liper," she said, "but it is near its reward."

She might have heard his teeth grate, if she had listened. She saw, however, that he did not turn his face toward her, and advancing a step nearer to him, she laid her hand gently upon his shoulder.

He recoiled from her touch, and she regarded him instantly with wonder, and an emotion which was very like fear.

There was an aspect, too, of intense curiosity in the searching look she bent upon him. Her mind raced over a hundred various incidents which were calculated to work this change in him, but she was unable to fasten upon one as the true one.

Still keeping her bright eye fixed upon his, she said, with great sternness—

"You are changed, Liper."

"No, Hager," he answered, with a bitterness in his tone which did not escape her, "I am unchanged."

"There is something on your mind which is unfavorable to me," she replied; "of that I am certain. What is it?"

He almost closed his eyes with a sullen expression.

"Let us not speak of that now," he answered. "What service is it you wish me to do for you? Let me know that before we proceed to any other subject."

Hager again looked at him with surprise.

"You do not speak to me, you do not look upon me, as of old, Liper," she observed, in a thoughtful tone. "Well, it is the first sign that my star has entered its last gloomy phase. It is a token that there is but a small period remaining in which I can perform my allotted task. Let it pass. What matters a blow more or less to a broken heart?"

He bent his head down, and he moved the point of his foot uneasily about the loose sand, but he offered no remark.

She drew a deep breath, and after another and more prolonged scrutiny of his features, without obtaining a more satisfactory result than before, she said to him:

"I wish to speak to you of the White Rose."

He looked up instantly and attentively.

"You are interested in her fate," she said sharply.

"I am," he replied steadily.

"Why?" she inquired, a little eagerly.

He paused for a moment, and then said, evasively: "It is interwoven with yours."

She looked earnestly at him, as if to ascertain whether that he made that observation truthfully, but his lips were compressed together, and his features appeared so rigidly set that she was left to place her own interpretation upon it.

"That is a feeling," she said, presently, "which may change with those which have already altered. Our fate are no longer interwoven; her star still shines brightly—mine is obscured; the future is a mist, out of which I must fashion my own end as best I can. For years I have had but one object, and that accomplished, I care not what follows. The world, but for this purpose, would be but a blank to me: that attained, the rest will be—chaos."

He glanced at her as she uttered the last words, and an expression of inward pain passed faintly over his features.

"What is that end, Hager?" he asked, with earnestness.

"Revenge!" she replied emphatically.

"Upon whom—the White Rose?" he asked, recalling.

She waved her hand impatiently.

"Upon one who has wronged me so irreparably, that no retribution which I can devise will approach his deserts!" she exclaimed.

"I understand," he rejoined, in a sullen tone.

"You do not, Liper, you cannot; your most fertile brain cannot conceive the measure of my wrong!" she rejoined, excitedly. "You," she added, with a curl of her upper lip—"you, what can you know of my inexplicable wrongs!"

He remained silent.

"They are nursed, cherished, fed in my own bosom," she continued; "and they, ever gnawing at my heart, they stimulate me, unceasingly, to achieve that species of revenge which will inflict pain forever on earth on the author of my miseries!"

"Let us speak of the White Rose," said Liper, in a hoarse undertone.

"I am about to do so," rejoined Hager; "for she will be one of the instruments by which I shall work."

He glanced furtively at her, but said nothing.

"Have you sought for her since you parted with her when on her way to London?" she asked.

"I have," he replied, laconically.

"And have discovered her?" she suggested.

"No!" he returned, as briefly.

"I will tell you where to seek for her," she rejoined. "She is where those now in search of her will never dream of seeking her. I happened to learn by accident, a short time back, where she was kept as a prized secret, to be brought forward at some moment suitable to the striking of a vengeful blow—a blow which, however well merited, would afford to me no atonement. I, therefore, watched the building in which, if I may judge by her subsequent conduct, she was detained more as a prisoner than as a guest.

"I stationed myself at a post where, from dawn to dark, I could watch the rooms in which I supposed her to be kept, and won my



reward, some three weeks since, by observing, in the gray of the dawn, a window overlooking a terrace leading to the garden open, a female push herself through, and drop on to the paved floor. "It was the White Rose!"

"She hurried down the garden, and unlocked a small gate, which led into the street beyond. She passed through the doorway, closed the door, and pressed onward. I followed her quickly, and saw her run wildly through street after street, as if regardless of the direction she was taking, so that she was enabled to get far away from the house she had just quitted.

"Through the labyrinth of streets she hurried, without pausing, until she found herself upon the banks of the river which flows through the heart of yonder huge city. At first I entertained the impression that it was her intention to drown herself."

"And you rushed forward to seize her?" interrupted Liper Leper, with ardor.

She gazed at him beneath her knitted brow.

"No!" she replied, coldly. "I knew that the hour had passed which made my life hang upon her safety, and I was curious to see in what direction her fate would conduct her."

"Hagar, Hagar! you did not, you could not stand by and see the White Rose take the dread leap into eternity, without one effort to save her," cried Liper Leper, clutching at Hagar's wrist with a grip which made her wince with pain.

"Why not?" answered Hagar, flinging off his grasp. "What was she to me more than a means by which I could wreak revenge upon others? I did not wish to compass her death by my own hand. I cared not to see her perish by the machinations of those whose duty it was to cherish her; and of herself, what had she to do with life, an outcast from her infancy, an outcast still. No, I stood beneath the shadow of a ruined warehouse, while she, with a gesture of seeming frenzy, pressed onward to the black, turbid waters, sweeping down to the sea with sullen and silent rapidity."

Liper Leper groaned and clenched his fists, his black eyes seemed to flash with fire, and his white teeth, though closely set together, were plainly visible between his lips.

There was danger in his aspect, danger to her who spoke of the life of the poor hunted creature, the particulars of whose wretched history no one knew better than himself, trembling upon the verge of destruction, with such cold heartlessness.

"And you yet stood still, Hagar?" he said, in a low, hoarse tone.

"I stood motionless as she advanced along a stone bank or wharf, to the very brink, where the water, deep and bedded with ooze and slime, lay beneath, prepared to receive her within its murky bosom. She seemed to gaze distractedly at it for an instant, and then she turned her face to the sky, as if to look her last upon it, and then—"

"You dashed forward and seized her?" again interposed Liper, wildly; "you did—you did, Hagar—if any one were to say to me that you did not, I would bury my knife to the hilt in his heart!"

"I did not!" exclaimed Hagar, emphatically.

Liper thrust his hand into his bosom with the growl of a tiger.

"There was no need, indeed, for my interference," she added, quickly, although she did not notice the sudden movement of his hand. "No sooner had she turned her eyes to Heaven than she seemed to cower and to shrink down almost in a heap. She then covered her face with her hands, and springing up again, she fled away in the same direction as that in which she came.

"I followed her still; she wandered on, she knew not where—nor did I, until again we reached the river, where it was crossed by a massive bridge, over which streamed incessantly people and vehicles. A species of instinct seemed to guide her footsteps, until she entered upon the same locality as that to which I and you bore her a sleeping child."

"Bermondsey!" ejaculated Liper, drawing a deep breath, the first he had inspired for some moments.

Large globules of cold perspiration stood thickly upon his forehead, he wiped them off with the hand which he had withdrawn from his vest.

"The very place," returned Hagar. "I do not think, however, that she recognized it," she added, reflectively, "her movements appeared to be made so entirely without a purpose; but strangely enough, as weary and exhausted—I was no less faint and fatigued—she moved slowly onward in her cheerless pilgrimage, the strong light of a lamp fell upon the face and form of a bowed old man, walking with the aid of a stick. Impulsively she hurried up to him, and laying her hand upon his shoulder, whispered some words in his ear."

"I am the Wanderer," muttered Liper Leper, under his breath.

"He turned quickly to her. I recognized in his face that of Daddy Windy. His extravagance on discovering who it was that addressed him knew no bounds. She spoke again to him, and he instantly conducted her to a house in which he dwells. I saw her enter it with him. I marked it down."

She drew forth a pocket-book, and taking from it a slip of paper, said:

"This is the address."

"She is still there?" observed Liper, interrogatively.

"She is!" returned Hagar. "I visited the spot this morning. The Daddy has obtained employment for her in flower-making; the pay is scanty, and the hours of labor long enough to quickly wear out body and soul. She believes, however, that she purchases obscurity, and a quick path to the grave, by this course of proceeding. And no doubt she



would, if she were permitted to continue such a career. She does not speak while she labors, and she weeps the night through, instead of sleeping. The Daddy is during the day incessantly engaged in raking up every incident connected with her early life; and should he hit upon the right track, he would, in a spirit of avarice, take the sting out of my scheme of revenge. She cannot, therefore, be permitted by me to remain where she is. Yet, by stratagem only, can she be drawn from her seclusion, and I have a plan to entice her away, which I know will not fail."

Liper folded his arms, and listened to what followed with an air of eager interest.

"It is this. Her desire to look upon her mother—perhaps to speak to her—I know to be intense," pursued Hagar.

"I know that to be true," observed Liper.

"It is my intention that she shall have an interview," rejoined Hagar, quickly. "I will confront the mother and the child. I will show to the proud Marchioness her unrecognized daughter. I will make her see and feel what a terrible spectre she has constantly haunting and crossing her path. I will recall to her memory a certain conversation which we held at Baby Hall, and then—"

"What?" inquired Liper, as she paused.

"I will leave the Marchioness, with a simple suggestion, to dispose of her daughter as she may think best," she answered, with a sneer.

Liper started, but he made no remark.

"The service which I shall require of you, Liper," she proceeded, "will be simply to seek her, and speak with her alone. You will tell her that you can conduct her to a spot where the mother who bore her, who has seen her, without acknowledging her, whom she has seen without knowing her, will be unattended, awaiting her coming. She will not fail to consent. You will make the appointment for the third night from this, after midnight. Meet her where you will, and then conduct her to the private door in the garden of Westchester House, the situation of which you know. I will be there awaiting you."

She paused. Liper Liper remained silent for a brief space, as if in deep thought.

Then he said:

"You speak of the White Rose as though she were the daughter of the Marchioness of Westchester. Is she so?"

"She is," replied Hagar.

"But is there any existing evidence to prove this beyond a question?" he inquired, regarding her earnestly.

"Circumstantial evidence in abundance," she answered; "but the only positive evidence which could have established the fact was centred in the person of Fanny Snellley, the girl who was murdered, and whose body was flung into the Beachborough brook."

"Unless the Marchioness admits the fact, it cannot be proved?" suggested Liper, reflectively.

"It cannot," she answered. "People may, and they would believe, if they saw them together, that they are mother and daughter, but so long as the Marchioness keeps her secret, no earthly power can prove her sin."

Liper mused for a moment, and then, assuming a cold tone, and with a sullen gloom upon his features, he said:

"Is the whole of the service of which you have spoken comprehended in the request that I shall see the White Rose and persuade her to visit her mother?"

"It is," she rejoined, and added, sarcastically; "perhaps you will find the task unpleasant to you."

"No," he replied, shortly.

"Why did you put your question to me?" she interrogated, with a quick, sharp glance at his face.

"Because it is the last service I can execute for you," he answered, with a firm voice.

"The last!" she echoed, with unqualified amazement.

"I will do your bidding," he responded; "but when the task has been performed we must part, and forever."

She looked at him as if she did not hear him aright. She glanced up at the heavens, where a single star had shone brightly; it was yet alone and resplendent.

She closed her eyes, as if she was suffering a spasm of unutterable agony, and then, as a deep sigh escaped her lips, she said, in a low tone: "Explain!"

"It is done in a few words," he answered; "I overheard all that passed between you and the proud Earl of Brackleigh in the gardens of Westchester House."

She recoiled a few paces from him, and she averted her head.

"I have loved you long, Hagar, with a fond and faithful devotion," he said, in tones of deep feeling. "I loved you when but a boy, and you were rapidly changing from girlhood to womanhood. I could not then have expected you to regard even seriously a boy's love. Yet, Hagar, a boy's love has this merit, it is sincere, and it is pure, and it has far less selfishness and more zeal than the worship of a devotee. My love for you was sufficient to induce me to abandon home, family, friends, everything—to enroll myself a member of your tribe, to follow you like a dog, to worship you, and to work for you like a slave. I did this without the hope of ever finding my love reciprocated. I believed that you had loved—I assumed that your love had been unrequited—I knew that you had suffered. You kept your secret so well that I could never even guess it. But I had forgotten that you were a woman, and I converted you into an ideal. I should have continued to love, to follow, and to serve a jilted, suffering, and virtuous woman, but mine is not a nature to prize a casket from which the most valuable jewel has been taken—and without resistance."

Hagar groaned and buried her face in her hands. She bowed her head beneath a



peroxysm of bitter anguish, and seemed as though she would cower and sink to the ground.

Suddenly, with a passionate cry, she tore her hands from before her eyes, and with an aspect of despairing rage, she turned to make some vehement exclamation to Liper, but he was no longer before her.

Turning her eyes to the distance beyond, she saw a misty shadow, fleeing as if pursued by some avenging spirit. She watched him until he disappeared, and then she drew her cloak round her and partly covered her face with one of its folds.

"We shall meet again," she muttered. "He will keep his promise. Of all the world, I have faith alone in him, and we will not part forever."

She ceased, and went slowly on her way alone. Liper, however, continued his career, and did not stop until he had reached the neighborhood of the address which Hagar had given him.

He then proceeded cautiously until he reached a narrow street, the centre of a complete maze of rows of small houses. It required a clue to discover the street in which, according to Hagar, Floret lay concealed, and an elaborate plan to be carefully studied to find the way out into a main thoroughfare again.

He who had trained himself to make such discoveries, and without failure, found no difficulty in picking out the house to which he was destined, and an ordinary person on first seeing it would have supposed it to be untenanted. There were no lights in the windows, nor were there any blinds to them; the panes were dust stained, and patched with old pieces of brown paper where they had been broken, while the frames were black with age, and looked as if a touch would crumble them to dust.

Liper looked up and down the street, and observed that there were a few persons about, some looking out of windows, others sauntering slowly up and down, smoking their pipes, and some careful mothers hunting up their stray blessings, in order that they might slap them for being out late, and hurry them as fast, ay, faster than their little legs could be propelled by nature to bed, supperless.

He sauntered about slowly, too, but not in such a manner as to excite suspicion in the minds of those to whom he was a stranger.

As he gained the end of the street he encountered a young member of the gipsy tribe, whom he had met during one of his country peregrinations, and whose quick eye recognized him as quickly as he knew him.

A few questions skilfully put enabled him to learn that Daddy Windy passed his evenings from nine to eleven, at a room in a public-house within the immediate neighborhood, bearing the suggestive sign of "The Case is Altered".

Here it was his custom to regale himself with suet-dry glasses of odoriferous "Jamaiker",

feebly diluted with warm water, and doctored with a lump or two of very cheap loaf-sugar of a dark whitey-brown. Since he had lost his "Dianner", he confessed to a weakness for the beverage, which he said, without intending to play upon the word, had "slew'd her". He gave way also to a weakness for the "fragrant weed", consumed through the bowl and stem of a stinking, old, black, clay pipe, darker than ebony, and which, therefore, was, in the smoker's parlance, "colored beautifully".

From nine to eleven he abandoned the cares of the world, surrendered himself to his mixture, and to the charms of a conversation which required a peculiar education to reciprocate.

Liper desired to learn no more; and withstanding a pressing invitation "to stand a pint", he bade his acquaintance farewell.

Seeming to quit the neighborhood, he loitered about the streets until he could venture to return to that in which Daddy Windy dwelt; and as he reached the corner of the street he caught a glimpse of the old man drawing the door of the house close after him.

He watched him attentively, and saw him give a cat-like dart to the opposite side of the way, then shuffle down the pavement, until he turned the corner and disappeared. Not quite satisfied that he had heard the truth, he followed the old man until he perceived him enter a low public-house, and did not content himself until, through a portion of the half-opened door of the room in which the Daddy enjoyed his nightly carouse, he saw the old man settled firmly upon a chair, filling his pipe, and preparing to give way to his feelings for a couple of hours.

He then returned to the house in which he understood Floret to be concealed, and applied himself to the task of effecting an entrance without being observed.

He tried a master-key upon the lock, and almost instantly opened the door and passed into a narrow passage.

He shut the door behind him, and was abruptly plunged into pitchy darkness. He groped his way cautiously, and quickly found a flight of stairs.

Before, however, he ascended them, he assured himself that there was no one in the lower part of the house. He then began to ascend, and at the top of the first and only flight of stairs, he saw the feeble rays of a candle shining through the crevices and crack of the door of a back room.

He turned the handle of the lock, which he quickly found, without a sound, and opening the door, peered in.

He saw a table covered with a heap of artificial flowers of the brightest crimson, scarlet, yellow, blue, green, and purple hues.

By the table, seated, bending over a wreath, which she was making rapidly, with exquisite taste, was a young, delicately-formed, fragile-looking girl. She seemed to be closely occupied, and deeply intent upon her work.

But presently she turned her face, absolute-



ly colorless, thin, and very, very wan, toward the door. Her eyes were full of tears, and the expression upon her countenance was a very sorrowful one.

Liper uttered an exclamation of sharp pain, and stepped forward, ejaculating, in a soft and plaintive voice:

"White Rose! O, my poor White Rose!"

She turned her startled eyes upon his face, she rose up, and seizing his extended hand, she laid her face upon his shoulder, and sobbed bitterly.

#### CHAPTER LXXIV.

"O! come to my bosom, my own stricken dear, Though the herd hath fled from thee, thy home is still here;  
O, here is the smile that no cloud can o'ercast,  
And the heart and the home still thine own to the last!"  
—MOORE.

It has been most truly said, that kindness begets kindness. A proof, in support of the truth of this aphorism, might have been adduced from the feelings with which Floret regarded Liper Liper.

His unwearying kindness to her, his gentle tenderness of manner at all times when addressing her, the ready spirit which he displayed at any moment to assist or to serve her, could not fail to have their natural effect upon a disposition like hers. His never-varying attention and deference to her wishes, when he was able to comply with them, raised within her breast an attachment for him, which might properly be called sisterly affection.

There was no touch of what is understood by the word love, fondness, or passion, in this feeling for him; he had been so truly her friend, that she regarded him as such in the purest sense of the word. Friend and counselor; one who had served her honestly and ably, and had directed her wisely—the only one in all the world to whom she could turn now for consolation and guidance.

No wonder that she rose up to greet him so warmly. No wonder that, overcome by her emotions, she wept upon his shoulder.

He gazed at her face a minute with tender compassion, and then, gently restoring her to her seat, he bent over her and whispered:

"Dry your tears, White Rose, I bring you tidings which will lift a heavy burden of pain and humiliation from your heart."

"I knew that I should see you, Liper," she said, striving to keep down her tears. "I was sure that you would not fail me in my darkest hour, and though you have been long in coming, you have come at last."

"If my heart were less sad, White Rose," he said, in a soft tone, "I should smile at your belief in my preternatural powers. You have always expected seeming impossibilities at my hands, in the full faith that I could surmount them at will, and I have been so fortunate as mostly to conquer them. When I have had the power to serve you, I have used it; while I have the power to continue to do so, I will exert it; therefore I am here."

"O Liper! I can, from my childhood, bear

testimony to your constant endeavor to lighten the load of affliction that I have borne, and I have faith in your readiness to do so still, although I have lost all hope forever. I have been looking for you—say, Liper, yearning to see you. You were my brother when I had no brother, and you will be so still."

"So long as you need me, White Rose—yes," he returned.

"I need your counsel greatly," she said, with much earnestness; "and you will give it me with impartiality and truthfulness, although you may believe that it is against my own inclinations, will you not? Ah! I know you will, Liper."

"White Rose," he said, looking at her gravely and earnestly, "you were wont to think and act for yourself; sorrow and suffering must have made an inroad, indeed, in your energy, when it impels you to speak to me in such a fashion as this."

"You know not what has occurred to me, Liper," she said, slowly turning her head away from him.

"I know much," he answered. "I was anxious to know what Hagar Lot would have to communicate to you when you were at the Gipsies' Home, and claimed your right to be free of all the race who pretended to a title to wield a power over you, which none of them possessed, and I, therefore, concealed myself where I could overhear all that she said. My motive was a strong one; I will give it to you presently. I, consequently, know her version of your history, and, therefore, one great cause for your unhappiness."

"One cause," she repeated, almost reproachfully; "was it not enough?"

"If it were true, certainly," he rejoined; "but it is not true," he added, emphatically.

"I have heard further statements relative to my wretched history," she responded, with a deep sigh, "which change some of the incidents and the characters, but the bitter facts remain, Liper. Hagar, misnamed my—my—the word chokes me, Liper, I am the child of her for whom I used to pray for as poor Godmamma Shelley."

She turned away and covered her eyes with her hands, while her bosom heaved convulsively.

"Who told you this?" he asked, almost fiercely.

"One who, at least, should be a competent authority," she returned, in a faint tone.

"It was a lie, White Rose—a base, a wicked lie, whoever told it," he exclaimed, with some excitement. "What more competent authority can there exist upon this point than myself, and I say it is an iniquitous lie!"

"You an authority, Liper?" she said, with surprise.

"Why not?" he returned. "Reflect—nay, I will briefly prove to you what an authority I am. I was concealed near to Hagar Lot when the Marchioness of Westchester instructed her to steal you from Beachborough. I stole you sleeping from your bed. I was with



Hagar Lot when the Marchioness saw you in the wood, and, overcome by her feelings, fainted. Would she have fainted, think you, if you had been the child of Fanny Shelley?"

Floret listened to him now with breathless eagerness.

"White Rose, after that night we were much together, and I saw nothing, heard nothing of the Marchioness of Westchester; but there came a time when we were parted. You were recovered by Susan Atten at Ascot Races. I still continued a slave to Hagar Lot. I accompanied her to Raby Hall, in Wiltshire; for there she had successive interviews with the Marchioness of Westchester, upon what subjects I had to employ the best means I could to learn. Hagar did not reveal a word to me, but I gathered sufficient to guess all. Now, mark this! Hagar instructed me to follow the Marchioness, who was about to undertake a secret journey, and she bade me not only ascertain whither she went, but to whom she spoke, and, if possible, the subject of any conversation that might take place. I followed the Marchioness, not without some hazard, and much difficulty and perseverance. She went to Brighton, and stayed at a great hotel there. I watched the house while she was within it. She entered a cutler's shop and purchased a knife. She hired a carriage, and proceeded along a road which ran by the side of the sea. The carriage stopped near to a church. She entered that church. I flitted in after her, and concealed myself. I heard her ask for a book, which was the register of marriages which had taken place in that church. It was given to her. She made an excuse to get rid of the clerk who attended upon her; and the instant he was gone, she bowed down over the book. I listened attentively, and I heard the sharp run of a knife over the paper. When she rose up, she hastily crushed a sheet of paper in her hand, and then hid it away. She returned to Raby Hall, and concealed it in a cabinet.

"White Rose, behold it!"

He drew from his coat, as he spoke, a folded sheet of paper, and opened it.

He spread it out before her, and pointed to it.

"Read it carefully," he resumed. "You see this is the register of a marriage between Constance Neville—the name Plantagenet is omitted, but that is of no consequence, Neville is one of her father's names—and of Lennox Bertram, who was then Viscount Bertram, and who is now Earl of Brackleigh. This is the ORIGINAL CERTIFICATE! Preserve it as you would your life, for it proclaims your legitimacy, as it records the marriage of the pair of whom Hagar spoke so falsely."

Floret read the certificate a dozen times with intense eagerness, and then she looked up at Liper with an utterly mystified and bewildered aspect. She placed her finger upon the name of Bertram.

"It was he who told me that I was the

daughter of Fanny Shelley," she exclaimed, in an undertone.

The brows of Liper lowered. He looked fixedly at her.

"When did he tell you this, and under what circumstances?" he inquired.

She replied by repeating to him every incident that took place while she was staying at Brackleigh Mansion.

When she had ceased, he, after musing for a few minutes, said—

"He has a weighty motive for not acknowledging you."

"What can it be?" she asked with distress.

"You will observe," he replied, "that this certificate is dated in the year 1832; the Earl of Brackleigh married his present wife in 1834, and the Marchioness the Marquis of Westchester about the same time, or shortly after. The first marriage is legal; the second is not. If the secret were to be publicly made known, the Earl would be made to suffer the penalty of the law; which, in his case, would be severe. Therefore, if he knew you to be his daughter, it would be to his interest to conceal it. The Marchioness stands in the same position."

Floret clasped her hands.

"Fate wearies not of persecuting me," she exclaimed.

Liper raised his hand deprecatingly.

"Listen to me, White Rose," he said quietly and firmly. "Let us probe the situation to the very seat of the cancer. When we are acquainted with the worst, we shall know better how to grapple with the position. The possession of that register proves, beyond the possibility of dispute, that Constance Plantagenet was married to Lennox Bertram, but it affords no proof that they were your parents. You resemble the Marchioness of Westchester to an extraordinary degree, and there is no moral doubt but that you are her daughter, yet there is no legal proof of it. The secret of your birth was kept by the Marchioness and Fanny Shelley; the latter is dead; the Marchioness alone can furnish the proof you require. Will she make the admission, think you?"

Floret hung down her head.

"It must be tried," said Liper. "She is a woman, with a woman's heart. Conventionalism has hardened it to some extent, but not so much as to drown the voice of nature. Dare you face her? Remember how much of your future happiness depends upon her admission to you that you are her child! What matters the circumstances which led her to the fearful step she has taken? They may be unfortunate, perhaps wicked, but you will prove to yourself that you are not basely, but honorably and nobly born; and will not that knowledge sustain you, and enable you to face and bear any or all other evils?"

Floret drew herself up erect, and with a proud, firm bearing, which brought a flush of satisfaction to Liper's cheek, she said:



"I feel that I am not base-born, that I have within my veins the blood of the high born and the noble, and terrible as may be the task of facing her who is, but who has not acted to me as, my mother, it shall not daunt me. Armed with this document, there is nothing that I shall fear, no one whom I will not face, nothing that I will not dare to be able to kneel and offer up my thanks to Heaven, that if it has seen fit to chasten, afflict, and try me sorely, even to make me an outcast, it has not doomed me to be nameless."

"Some of your old spirit spoke there, spring-flower," exclaimed Liper, eyeing her with quiet admiration. "You will have occasion for all of it that you can rouse into action, for there is much yet to be done. I will conduct you to a spot where you shall meet the Marchioness of Westchester face to face, where she cannot rush from you without uttering a word, and where she must listen to you. I leave to you the task of winning or wringing from her an acknowledgment of you; but I shall be prepared to learn that while with her eyes, her manner, her emotion, she confesses you to be her child—ay, her only child—she, with her tongue, will refuse to concede it. In that event it will lead you to adopt another less satisfactory course, but one which must result in success. Circumstantial evidence, where the chain is direct, though a link be deficient, will certainly be received as conclusive as if the link were not lost at all."

He paused for an instant only, as if to concentrate his energies on what he had further to communicate to her. Taking a deep inspiration, he resumed:

"There is also another contingency against which we must provide. I feel a deep reluctance to mention it to you, but you have more than one enemy, White Rose, though you have given occasion to no living creature to breathe a wish to injure you, and we must be prepared against all. Much as you have seen of gipsy life, and of the people of various tribes, there are many secrets possessed by them which are wholly unknown to you. I, who am not a gipsy born, and only partly gipsy bred, have become master of most of them, through a never-dormant spirit of inquiry which inhabits my breast. One of the branches of secret knowledge which gipsies possess is the properties and effects of various vegetable poisons. Of these there is one, known only to them, which slays its victim and leaves behind no trace of its deadly presence. It is known among us by the name of *drei*. It is obtained from a fungus which grows only in peculiar spots and at peculiar seasons; it must only be gathered when it is at a certain stage, and it requires wondrous care and knowledge in the manner of drying and preparing it. When ready for use, it resembles a brown, impalpable dust. A pinch of it dropped into a liquid, or on to any edible substance, even an apple or a strawberry, would be swallowed without detecting any unpleasantness of taste, and it would be fatal. The

symptoms which first appear are, an irritation in the throat and a tendency to cough. The cough increases rapidly, followed by burning fever, then ensues the bursting of a blood vessel, and then death. None of the symptoms are such as to rouse a suspicion even in the mind of the medical attendant of the presence of poison, and he prescribes the ordinary medicines in vain. The patient dies under his hand, however skillful his treatment. The reason is this: as soon as the grains of powder are swallowed, they attach themselves to the lining of the throat, chest, and lungs, they instantly germinate, and grow with enormous rapidity. They throw out long, silken filaments, no thicker than a fine hair, and these clog every attempt at breathing. Nature tries to rid herself of them by the action of coughing, and destroys itself."

He paused.

Floret listened to him with a species of affrighted fascination, and, with a sickening sensation, she said:

"But, Liper, why do you speak of this poison to me?"

"Because, White Rose," he added, in a marked and significant tone, "the Marchioness of Westchester has some of this poison in her possession."

She drew herself up haughtily, and, in an offended tone, said:

"Liper, you do not think of whom you are speaking. Do not offer such horrible suggestions to me, or I shall not like you."

He shook his head with a mournful expression.

"I would that I had it not to say, White Rose," he replied, in a subdued tone; "but it is better that I should incur your displeasure now, by warning you, than lament, when too late, that I had not risked your anger and told you all. Hagar Lot also possesses some of this devilish powder, and she is not your friend."

"I have always shrunk from that strange woman with a kind of instinctive aversion," exclaimed Floret, with a slight shudder.

"You may continue to do so," rejoined Liper, significantly, "but do not let her know that you entertain such a feeling against her. She is subtle, and, I fear, remorseless. She is very dexterous, too, and will pause at nothing to accomplish her ends. If she determines upon your destruction, nothing will save you from the administration of the poison by her. You will discover this when you find yourself attacked by a sudden dryness in the throat. The poison will then have begun to operate, and no medical skill will avail to save you."

"Is there nothing existing which will counteract its baleful effects?" she asked, with a terrified look.

"There is," returned Liper; "long and patient search and experiments have enabled me to discover an antidote. I have tried it upon myself, after swallowing some *drei*, and am assured of its perfect efficacy."



He produced a small bottle of a whitish green liquid, and gave it to her.

"A few drops of that in a glass of water, swallowed immediately you feel that the first symptom of the poison has developed itself, will destroy the effect of the venomous fungus, and eradicate it from the system. Carry it always about you. It will prove effectual even when the poison is in its most virulent stage."

She took it from him with an expression of thankfulness, and concealed it in the bosom of her dress.

"A few more words to you, White Rose, and then I must depart," he said, with an unconcealed sadness of tone: "I must have your promise to meet me, wherever you please to name, on the third evening from this, that I may conduct you to the presence of the Marchioness of Westchester. Will you give it to me of your own free inclining, for if you shrink from the ordeal, you shall not—"

"I do not shrink from it, Liper," she interposed, quickly. "I will meet you, and I will see her; death from her hand would be preferable to life, without the interchange of one word with her—my mother, Liper, whom, knowingly, I have never seen, to whom I have never spoken."

"The Daddy leaves this house at nine every night, does he not?" he asked.

"He does!" returned Floret.

"And returns at eleven?" he continued.

"I believe so!" she answered. "I have taken little heed of his going or coming since I have been here."

"On the third night from this, I will be at the corner of the street, awaiting you, immediately after the Daddy is away from this house," he added.

"I will join you, Liper, if I live," she returned.

"And you must never return to this squalid home again," he said, firmly.

She turned her head away.

"I did not expect to find you with the Daddy again, White Rose," he said, in a slightly-reproving tone, after a moment's pause; "wherever you might have sought an asylum, I did not believe that it would have been beneath his roof."

She turned to him and said, rapidly and impatiently:

"I was taunted with my birth. I was told that I was the offspring of shame, the child of a poor village-girl, who had been deceived and abandoned. I regarded myself as one of the meanest, if not the meanest, of God's creatures upon earth. I fled from the taunt, from the brand of humiliation and shame. I fled from myself, I knew not, cared not, whether: it might have been to death—in my then frame of mind it would have been my happiest haven. Nay, I was upon its verge, but my better angel held me back. Still I fled, as if pursued by hisses of scorn, by hoofs of insult, by pointing fingers, by mocking cries and gibes, by words of bitter reproach. O Liper! you

cannot know what horrors I endured during that terrible flight. I knew not where I was; at a moment that I felt Nature could undergo no further exertion, and I was about to sink with exhaustion, the form of the Daddy appeared before me. Repulsive as it had always been, it was welcome now. He was the only being living who knew me—whom I wished to know me."

"White Rose," exclaimed Liper, reproachfully. She waved her hand.

"I was at the time frenzied," she said, in the same hurried tone. "Still I remembered that the old man lived in the meanest and most secluded locality, and I thought that the wretched home would afford me an undiscoverable retreat, in which to hide my shame. I spoke to him a few words—words which I knew would prevent him receiving me, or attempt to exert any control over me, except upon my own terms. He joyfully recognized me, and brought me to this place. I offered to pay him his demand for two miserable rooms and my food; he agreed to supply me with work, by which I could raise the means to pay him. You see it before you," she said, pointing to the heaps of artificial flowers which were upon the table and the floor, close to where she had been sitting. "It is the toil of the slave," she continued, speaking with bitterness; "labor from dawn to midnight, to earn a wretched sum, barely adequate to the support of life, and leaving nothing for the supply of other things which are equally necessities with food. Why is it, Liper, that longer hours of labor should be demanded and expected from woman than from man, and that they should be paid so much, so very much less for their work?"

Liper shrugged his shoulders, and looked around him.

"You are weary of your toil, White Rose—you may well be," he answered. "You are in a fitting mood to leave it behind you; it has been one more weight added to your burden, and you must not omit it in the list you will have to submit to the proud Marchioness of Westchester. Let all such, however, end here," he concluded; "you have higher capabilities than are required in the manufacture of such things as these upon which you have been employing yourself, and such a home as this is no home for you. Remember, White Rose, that the crimes of others do not make you guilty; that their shameful acts do not make you shameful; that it is, indeed, your duty to redeem in your person, so far as you can, the errors of which they have been guilty. Should the worst come to the worst, and you prefer to live in retirement, with that register in your possession, and the conviction in your mind that you are legitimately entitled to a high and proud name, you may live in peace, in respectability, and in comfort."

She looked at him, and placed her hands in his, and said, with a forced and sorrowful smile:



"At school, while working at the classics, Liper; there was an aphorism with which I met, and which was afterward incessantly running in my mind; it was: '*Aut Caesar aut nullus!*' I will be the daughter of a marchioness, or—the Poor Girl!"

"I will not argue with you now on this point," he rejoined; "but if I need for it should arise, I will argue with you until I bring you to my way of thinking. Farewell, White Rose, remember your appointment, and keep it."

He pressed her hands, and glided swiftly away, leaving her in a far calmer frame of mind than that in which he had found her.

At the hour, and on the night appointed, Liper was at his post.

He watched the Daddy appear from the door of his house, and go through the same stealthy and cat-like performance as before. He followed him round to the corner of the street, and saw him enter the public-house, and then he returned to the appointed spot.

Floret was there.

Without a word he led the way to a street in which stood a cab. He handed her into it, and mounted the box with the coachman, and, after a long drive, the vehicle stopped according to his directions.

He jumped down, bade the driver wait, and assisting Floret out, conducted her through several turnings. He paused before a door let into a long brick wall, and opening it, admitted her.

"Do not speak a word to any one," he whispered, "and tread softly!"

In another minute she was confronted by Hagar Lot, who gazed at her for a moment sternly. Then a savage smile broke over her face.

She beckoned Floret to follow her, and, by a secret entrance, obtained admission to a large house.

She ascended several flights of narrow stairs, and paused before a door.

This she opened without a sound.

"Enter there," she whispered to Floret, pointing to a gorgeously-furnished room, lighted by a brilliant lamp.

With a beating heart, but with a proud step, Floret obeyed her.

## CHAPTER LXXV.

The circle smiled, then whisper'd, and then sneer'd;  
The misses bridled, and the matrons frown'd;  
Some hoped things might not turn out as they fear'd;  
Some would not deem such women could be found;  
Some never believed one half of what they heard;  
Some look'd perplex'd, and others look'd proud;  
And several pitted with sincere regret  
Poor Lord Augustus Fitz-Plantagenet."

—BYRON.

When the Marchioness of Westchester quitted the Earl of Brackleigh, his burning glances were glittering before her eyes, his fervid words were quivering in her ears, and an almost overpowering thrill was pervading her frame, for she had once more reclined upon

his shoulder, had once again instinctively yielded to his embrace, and had felt the warm pressure of his hand.

Alas! the emotion was only too pleasurable to her. She had once loved him with an ardent and unselfish sincerity, because she believed him to be the *beau idéal* of a man, not only physically but mentally. He had forced her to despise him, but the love she had borne him had never been eradicated.

She loved him still; loved him, although she scorned him; but that, unfortunately for her, was an attribute of her woman's nature. It is rare to find an instance of a woman's love turning to hate after she discovers the man who has won her affection to be no better than a selfish knave. Woman's hate may spring out of contemned love, it seldom does out of her inward contempt for the object of her affection. No woman will acknowledge that she can, does, or could love a man whom she at the same time must despise; but she does, nevertheless. Byron certainly had this belief in his mind when he wrote:

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,  
'Tis woman's whole existence."

It was true, at least, of the Marchioness of Westchester.

She hurried to the summer-house, as had been arranged by her pretty maid, Fane—Nat Ferret's second, and, as yet, strongest weakness—and had barely time to arrange herself in a pensive attitude, naturally enough assumed by her, when she heard a staid footstep upon the gravel path near to her; presently it paused before the door, and a head was pushed forward into the more than semi-darkness, and a voice exclaimed:

"Lady Westchester, are you here?"

Faint, quivering, trembling, with a strange sickness at heart, and an involuntarily tendency to sigh, deeply, which she felt herself powerless to prevent, she rose up and moved out of the summer-house.

The Marquis stood before her—he gazed at her sternly and questioningly.

"This is a new and strange caprice of yours, Lady Westchester," he said, in a low, sneering tone.

"Will your lordship condescend to explain your meaning to me?" she replied, in as cold and haughty a tone as she could command.

"I allude to your wandering at this strangely late and unseemly hour, alone and untended," he returned, biting his lip. "What is your motive?"

"My will!" she replied, with contracted brows.

"And it will be mine, Lady Westchester, that you do not repeat this imprudence," he returned, quickly.

He heard a low, scornful laugh escape her lips. He grated his teeth together, and then added:

"Your movements have been strangely erratic of late, Lady Westchester. Whenever I have occasion to speak with you, it seems that I can learn nothing of your movements from



my people, and when compelled to seek for you myself, I find—"

"Fane," interposed the Marchioness, turning to her maid, who was following them, and speaking in a light, scoffing tone, which made the Marquis writhe, "you will not forget, in the morning, to provide a silken cord, one end of which the Marquis may affix to my girdle, and the other to his own wrist. What color shall the silken fetters be, Westchester—rose?"

The Marquis turned sharply and beheld the maid close at his elbow. He started, and said sternly to her, as he pointed to the house:

"You can go in!"

"Nay!" interposed the Marchioness, with the same affected playfulness of tone; "I cannot for a short time dispense with the assistance of Fane. My erratic movements have somewhat disordered my attire and hair. I must have them restored to that normal condition of which the proprieties of society approve. Does your lordship wish to speak with me?"

"I do, Lady Westchester," he said, grandly.

"And alone?" she pursued.

"Alone!" he repeated.

"Ever obedient to your wish, Lord Westchester," she said, frigidly, but with a glittering eye. "I will attend you in your study a few minutes hence, but I must first claim the indulgence of being allowed to retire to my own chamber, in order that my toilet, when I again appear before you, may be all that your lordship's most fastidious sense of decorum will approve."

The Marquis grated his teeth together, but he remained silent. The Marchioness knew that he would do so; she had adopted the spirit and tone of her observations to him before Fane, in order that she might silence him. She knew what gall and poison she was pouring into his ears, and she derived a species of vicious gratification from the knowledge.

No man can so deeply wound the susceptibilities of his own sex as can a woman. She knows so exactly where and how to stab him; and, curious problem that she is, she will do this at all times in sport, and wonder afterward, when the results of her mischievous mirth begin to show themselves, that her bitter and dangerous insinuations should ever have been taken in earnest.

The Marquis of Westchester stalked up to the house in silent moodiness. He halted as they all entered a room by a French window. It was lighted by a massive gilt chandelier. He pulled out his watch and examined it, and in a voice which was scarcely audible, he said:

"I shall expect your ladyship in my study in a quarter of an hour from this time. It is now ten o'clock, Lady Westchester."

The Marchioness turned to her maid, and in a tone that she had never before condescended to address to her, she said:

"I think we shall require ten minutes longer grace—eh, Fane?"

The maid, whose face was as white as marble, bent respectfully, and said, faintly:

"Yes, my lady."

The Marquis darted a sharp and angry glance at Fane, and was by means reassured when he observed how pale and frightened she looked.

"At half-past ten I will attend your lordship," resumed the Marchioness, addressing him with seeming ease, "if I may trespass on your lordship's gracious consideration for the longer term."

He only bowed, he would not trust himself to reply, and quitted the room with an unconcerned aspect of ill-humor.

At half-past ten, the Marchioness appeared before him, dressed for an evening party. He stared at her with amazement.

"Are you going out to-night, Lady Westchester?" he exclaimed, in an angry tone.

"I am going out to-night, Lord Westchester," she answered, slowly and composedly, as she fastened a bracelet upon her wrist.

"You amaze me," he exclaimed, with a movement in his throat, as if he were half suffocated.

She looked up at him and smiled—such a smile. It gave him a sensation of faintness. There appeared to be in it an expression of reckless determination, as though she knew that she was about to violate some law, social or moral, and would suffer no consideration to deter her from her purpose.

"Ought I to have requested permission of your lordship before I accepted the engagement of this evening?" she asked, in a taunting tone. "It has not been our usual course of proceeding; but life, I am told, is full of changes. Do we enter upon the new arrangement to-night, Lord Westchester?"

Again he appeared to feel as if he were choking, but by a strong effort he concealed as much of his emotion as he could.

"Where are you going, Lady Westchester?" he asked.

"I have told you," she said, glancing at her white, round, polished shoulders; "to fulfill an engagement which I have accepted."

He bit his upper lip beneath his moustache with a force almost sufficient to bite it through.

"An engagement, Madam, with whom?" he interrogated, sternly. "At least, it is my privilege to ask that."

She arranged the small and beautiful bouquet which was fastened in the centre of the bosom of her dress, and replied with an elongated

"Ye—es!"

He waited for her to proceed, but presently she said, with an impatient tone:

"What have you to say to me, Westchester? Why do you not say it? You will make me late for my appointment—a—that is, I promised to be early."

"Promised whom, Lady Westchester?" he exclaimed, furiously. "I insist upon your telling me that."



She looked at him between her half-closed eyes.

"How demonstrative you have grown of late, Westchester," she remarked, with a scornful curl upon her upper lip, and added, with an affected surprise, which almost drove him frantic: "What can possibly have occurred to draw you out of your usual apathetic, cold indifference to everything—even to me? I should almost have felt disposed to add that last remark seriously, but that I have been so long to you the object of unconcern, and—and—distant contemplation, only that it would have been an absurdity for me to have dragged it in as though I meant it."

He rose to his feet, trembling with rage—the worst of all rage—jealous rage.

"Lady Westchester," he commenced, making almost superhuman efforts to speak coldly, but firmly; "I will not condescend to refer to your taunts—to say nothing harsher of them, they are both unbecoming and unworthy of you—but I will know not only where you are going, but whom you are going to meet."

She re-arranged a bracelet, and fixed her eyes steadfastly upon it, and said, in an indifferent, almost drawing tone:

"Really, Westchester, I imagined that you did not concern yourself one jot about where I go, or whom I meet."

"You find, Madam, that you are mistaken. I am resolved that I will know both," he said, trying to moisten his parched lips with his yet more parched tongue.

"Indeed, I think you very foolish," she replied, with a short laugh.

He stamped his foot, and cried, fiercely:

"Lady Westchester, this banter is indecent. You shall not leave this roof, Madam, unless I know where you are going, and the name of the person whom you have arranged to meet. When I have that information, I shall know how to act."

She sat down upon a chair, and laughed with seemingly great enjoyment. He grew livid with passion, and gripped her so sharply by the wrist, that she screamed with pain.

Then she rose up with her usual proud, haughty mein, and by an exertion of considerable strength, flung off his hand.

She glanced at him scornfully, from toe to crest, and said, contemptuously:

"You forget yourself, my Lord Marquis of Westchester."

He threw his clenched hands in the air, and exclaimed, passionately:

"I will endure this torture no longer. I will not be the scoffed, the scorned, the derided, as well as the duped."

"The what? Lord Westchester!" she interposed, sharply—so sharply and distinctly, that it somewhat recalled him to a calmer frame of mind. Then she added, as for a moment he remained silent:

"Beware how you make assertions which you are unable to support by proof. Your

insinuations I despise, your assumptions I hold in contempt; but your assertions are deliberate charges, and if you make one against me, bearing reference to the observation which you have just made, I will compel you to prove it."

"You will compel me to prove it, Lady Westchester?" he returned, with unqualified amazement. "May I ask you in what shape?"

"By an application to the Ecclesiastical Court for a divorce," she said, with a peculiar and a bitter emphasis, which appeared to beat him down with their terrible force: for he tottered and staggered, and sank into his seat again. "You will there have the opportunity of bringing forward your charges, and of substantiating them, if you can!"

"Woman, you torture me to madness!" he cried, and flinging his arms upon the table, he bowed his head upon them.

She gazed upon him with an expression of compassion, commiseration, or even pity visible upon her countenance, and there was a strange, head glitter in her eye, which told that the worst part of her nature was then in the ascendant. She looked at him and spoke to him as if he were an incumbrance, an annoyance, a troublesome object in her way—one whose absence would leave her free as air.

Yet she did not wish to take the initiative to bring about a separation between them; she was anxious to force him to act, and with that object she determined, as she knew how, to work upon his proud, susceptible nature, to goad him into a mad hatred of her, the result of which would be, that he would pause at nothing to wrench his liberty from him.

She did not take into her calculations two facts; one that he really loved her; and the other, that when a man over fifty falls in love, his passion mostly becomes an infatuation that no cruelty on the part of the woman can dispel.

As she gazed upon his convulsed frame, she did not suppose that she had extorted from him a passionate burst of scalding tears. She imagined that his quivering limbs betokened only suppressed rage; and the effect of his agony was not, therefore, the same upon her mind as it might have been if she had judged it truthfully. She therefore replied, coldly:

"You torture yourself, Lord Westchester, and please to throw the responsibility upon my shoulders. I beg that this childish scene may end—I am pressed for time. You had better defer the communication which you have to make until the morning; I can then give you the day—if that will be long enough."

He rose up; his face was as white as if life had departed from it.

"Do you yet refuse to inform me whither you are going to-night?" he said, in a voice which had a tone of desperation in it.

She only glanced at him, and again busied herself in touching and disposing of the flowers in her bosom.

"Refuse you, Lord Westchester," she re-



plied, with a supercilious smile. "I have never refused any such thing, if you will do me the favor to refer to your exceedingly fertile memory."

"You withheld it, Madam," he cried, imperiously.

"I do not, Sir!" she responded, in a tone which resembled his own so closely, that it sounded like mockery.

"For the last time, I ask you whither you are going to-night, dressed thus?" he exclaimed, in a low, savage voice, but still with an assumption of dignity, which was preserved only by a great effort. "I ask you, Lady Westchester, plainly and categorically, and I cannot, nor will I, receive an evasive reply."

"Then, Lord Westchester," she returned, in as grandiloquent a tone as his own, "in obedience to your commands, I beg to inform you that I am about to proceed to Plantagenet House, to meet the Lady Henrietta Plantagenet, Mr. Plantagenet, and—"

She paused abruptly.

"Whom?" was asked, quickly.

"Really," she subjoined, with a slight shrug of the shoulder, "I cannot say—I have not seen Lady Henrietta's list."

"I will accompany you," he said, laconically.

"Impossible!" she said, hastily, and half checked herself.

"Why?" he inquired, quickly and sternly.

"You will be so late," she returned, with an altered expression, and an affected pouting of the lip; "you have to dress. Mamma will expect me much earlier than I can possibly reach her if I wait for you. You can defer your visit to another opportunity. Mamma will be glad to see you some day next week."

Lord Westchester champed his teeth together, and approaching the bell, rang it with some violence.

A servant quickly appeared.

The Marchioness watched with glittering eyes from behind her fan the expression of the Marquis's face while he addressed the servant; and she listened to hear what he would say.

"Is Lady Westchester's carriage at the door?" he asked, sharply.

"It is my Lord," returned the man.

"Detain it there. I shall accompany her ladyship. Send my valet to my room."

The man bowed and disappeared.

The Marchioness laughed.

"While your lordship is dressing, I will return to my chamber," she said, with bitter sarcasm, "and dispatch Fane for the silken cord which is henceforward and for ever to attach us together; but I think we must change the color. It should be yellow—how say you, Westchester?"

He moved toward the door through which the servant had passed, and removing the key, held it up.

"This is my answer to your ladyship," he said; and closing the door behind him, he looked it on the outside.

For a moment she appeared to be over-

whelmed with amazement. The conduct of the Marquis was so wholly unlike anything that she had seen of him, or could have expected of him, that she stood quite bewildered.

At length, taking a deep breath, she set her teeth together, as she paced the room.

"Tyranny, insult, and vulgarity combined," she muttered. "The struggle has indeed commenced now. We shall see which will go to the wall. I will sunder the tie which I fastened myself, at every hazard; and for the episode of to-night I will punish him to-night. Jealous fool! Fool, because he has betrayed his infirmity to me, and I will work upon it until I drive him insane. The jealous man who has pride reigning over every action of his life, and breathing in every sentiment he utters, is worse than an idiot if he permits her of whom he is jealous to perceive his distrust of her."

She seated herself, and played nervously with her fan, and for some short time reflected seriously and abstractedly. Then she rose up and paced the room again.

"He is in the way," she exclaimed; "but for him the result of mutual explanations might be a re-union with Bertram, without a return of that apathetic listlessness which parted us. But he is cured of that now; he has learned to estimate the value of the prize he has lost, and he will, when it is restored to him, be careful not to lose it again, and forever. Yes, the struggle has commenced. I have poisoned Westchester's—Mercy! Why can I not rid myself of that dreadful thought? Why did that woman-fiend place in my hands a power so terrible, a temptation so fearful? Poison, it has a ghastly sound—a mere pinch of the dust, and I should be free. No, no, no! it must not be. I will forget that I have ever received the deadly substance from her, or remember it only when life has grown insupportable to me. No; my plan, which I have already commenced, is the best. He can feel; that I see, and I will torture him to madness, until I make him fly from me, as though I were a venomous serpent."

Even while the last thought was passing through her mind, she perceived the Marquis standing at the now open door, and heard him say:

"Your carriage awaits you, Lady Westchester."

"And the silken cord!" she exclaimed, forcing an icy laugh.

"Permit me to be your escort, Lady Westchester," he responded, as though he did not hear her, in his most frigid tone.

She bowed, and they made their way to the carriage, entered it, and were driven rapidly to Plantagenet House.

As they were about to alight, the Marchioness observed:

"I am quite distressed to think I should have been the occasion of drawing you from your study. I know that you are so fond of your books, and you must be aware that I can manage to pass my time without you quite agreeably. I fear that you have spoiled your



own pleasure this evening, and," she added, dropping her voice slightly, "my enjoyment, too."

"Possibly, I have interfered with your arrangements," he remarked, sarcastically.

"Not exactly that, Lord Westchester," she replied. "I intended to infer that I shall not enjoy myself unless I perceive that you move about and are quite gay. You know that your society is eagerly sought for by several dowagers, who were rather anxious to catch you in your youth, and who are disposed to regard you with favor now, although you were once proof to their blandishments."

He dared not trust himself to reply to her scolding remarks, although he felt them bitterly. He employed himself in revolving in his mind those circumstances with which he was acquainted, and which were damaging to her; and he resolved again to prosecute an inquiry into them, and, when he had completed it, to bring her to an unequivocal understanding with him. He quite believed by the time he had done this, he should have encountered the Earl of Brackleigh and have slain him in mortal combat.

Strange infatuation! He believed that the death of that man would induce the Marchioness to bestow upon him that affection which she should have regarded him with when they were married, and which he knew only too well had never been his.

That night was a terrible one for both.

The assembly of Lady Henrietta Plantagenet was very fully attended, and the Marchioness, as usual, was one of the most beautiful and best dressed women in the room. As usual, too, she commanded the admiration of the opposite sex, and the envy of her own.

But not, as usual, was she cold, haughty, and reserved. She displayed, on the contrary, the greatest vivacity; she listened to flattering remarks, and received flattering attentions in such a manner as to render the Marquis all but delirious.

He followed her about as closely as her shadow; he gazed at her vindictively when he considered that she had become too demonstrative, and he frowned malignantly at the Lady Henrietta Plantagenet, who—delighted to see her daughter display so much sprightliness—brought to her every young man of fashion who was more noted for his rank, wealth, and good looks, than for his scrupulous morality.

The Marchioness danced much: she did not miss a waltz; but he paced round the dancers slowly, after the fashion—if it were not too ludicrous to describe his action—of that nobleman who walks round a horse circus, in attendance upon the young lady of high rank who performs equestrian wonders on the bare back of a flying steed.

Pale, as though heated to a white heat, he paced the outer ring, keeping his fiery eyes fastened upon the Marchioness during the whole of her evolutions, and was at her side the instant the dance ceased.

The change in the behavior of the Marchioness created quite a sensation: every one present was delighted—except the Marquis, who was suffering the wildest agonies of a silent frenzy.

Occasionally, in spite of his jealous watchfulness, the Marchioness would escape from him; and he would, after a sharp, smart search, find her absolutely laughing and flirting, like a young girl, with some earnest eyed, handsome fellow, who, from that moment, he consigned to the realms of his eternal hate.

A young duke, who was just out of a long minority, and who was possessed of an enormous rent-roll, and a reputation which should have closed the door of every respectable family against him, was attracted by the singular beauty and vivacity of the Marchioness, and paid her much court. His attentions to her the Marquis looked upon as a deliberate insult to his honor, and the Marchioness received them without that look of icy frigidity which had always previously repelled from her so many men of his stamp and class.

The Marquis, though writhing with torture, was unable to offer a remark respecting him to the Marchioness; because, while there was much in his looks and manner to which he could take exception, there was nothing so palpable as would warrant his playing the part of the jealous husband before such an assemblage as were there present.

Twice or thrice he suggested to the Marchioness that he should conduct her to her carriage; but she declined, with a frown and a gesture which suggested that he was troublesome, and was not entitled to one iota of her consideration.

He raged inwardly at her treatment of him, and he determined to retaliate in some way, if possible. A design which he had already in his mind, and which his own precipitate jealousy had deferred, he resolved should be carried out the very next day, if it were possible. While in this desperate frame of mind, standing somewhat apart from the Marchioness, for she would neither speak to nor take notice of him while he stood by her side, Lord Nihilabum, who was speaking to him, and to whom he was unable to pay the slightest attention, even though he was congratulating him warmly upon the "thpwrightlith of the Mawthioneth," suddenly fired a hundred pound cannon-shot in his ear in the way of a question.

"Do you know Brackleigh?" he asked.

"Ye—ye—yes—no—n—n—no!" returned the Marquis, excitedly. "Is he here?"

"He wath a few momenth back," returned Lord Nihilabum.

"Where—where?" interrogated the Marquis, eagerly.

"In one of the ante-chambethth," returned Lord Nihilabum. "Would you like to know him? I will intwoduth you."

"I wish much to meet with him, pray take me where we shall see him!" he answered, with a kind of feverish impatience.

"With playthaw," drawled his Lordship;



"Brackleigh will be only too delighted to make you an acquaintance, I am sure. Thith way!"

He led the way from the splendid saloon, in which the dancing was being carried on, in newspaper parlance, "with much spirit"; the Marquis following with knitted brows, set teeth, and clenched hands.

They searched all the ante-chambers; but in vain—Lord Nihilalbum was unable to un-kennel the Earl of Brackleigh—and they returned disappointed to the saloon, the Marquis declaring that the lordship must be mistaken, and his lordship guessing that he was not.

On reaching the saloon, the Marquis, annoyed that he should have been drawn away for a moment from observing the conduct of the Marchioness, looked eagerly for her; but, to his dismay, he did not, on glancing round the room, perceive her. He looked more carefully among the promenaders, but she was nowhere visible.

He quitted the side of Lord Nihilalbum, and commenced a distracted search for her; but it was quite clear that she was no longer in the saloon.

He hurried as swiftly as he durst through the ante-chambers, but with no better success. Sick at heart, frenzied in mind, and cold as ice, he makes his way back to the saloon, and there almost ran over Lady Henrietta Plantagenet.

He inquired shortly and sharply of her of the Marchioness, and she replied, that she fancied that she had seen her enter one of the floral recesses with the young Duke of St. Aubyn, whose attentions to her during the evening, she declared, had been of the most gratifying description.

With a curse upon his lips, the Marquis made a dash at the floral recesses; but he was unable to find the duke or the Marchioness or any one of them.

With an effort, which cost him an excess of agony, he made some inquiries, in blank terms, for the Marchioness of some of those busy-bodies and know-alls, who manage to extort admission to such receptions and assemblies by some backstairs influence, and who reward the grace accorded to them by taking note of everything that passes, and repeating it when it will be likely to be of pecuniary service to them.

One of these, a painted harridan, told him, with a smile, that she had seen the Marchioness a few minutes previously leaning upon the arm of the young Duke of St. Aubyn, and proceeding, she presumed, to her carriage; she was certainly leaving the house.

With a gasp, he made a rush toward the hall, and inquired of one of the footmen whether his carriage was within call. He was told that the Marchioness had just gone away in it. "Alone?" he asked.

The footman could not inform him.

With an aspect like a ghost, he hurried from the house, engaged a street-cab, and drove direct home by the nearest route.

On reaching his mansion, it had, as he gazed wistfully and with a beating heart at it, a silent and deserted look. Neither his carriage nor any other was near. With a sinking heart and a whirling brain he entered his house and inquired whether the Marchioness had returned.

He was informed that she had been home nearly a quarter of an hour, and that his carriage had returned for him to Plantagenet House.

Although there was some relief in the intelligence, he retired with harrowed feelings to his room, and passed a dreadful night. Early in the morning, he sent a message to the Marchioness, requesting that she would receive him to breakfast with her. She pleaded fatigue, and promised to attend him in his study at twelve o'clock.

He awaited her coming with intense impatience, for he feared that she would not keep her word; but at the hour appointed she stood before him.

She was pale and changed in her manner; she was cold, reserved, gloomy, and haughtier than ever.

She awaited his attack.

The first question he addressed to her was to request her to inform him why she returned home without him. Her answer, calmly and readily given, was, that she felt fatigued, and wished to return home; but as his lordship was not in the saloon, and as he had not condescended to inform her whither he was going, or whether he would return, she accepted the nearest escort at hand, and proceeded to her carriage.

"Who was that escort?" he inquired.

She replied, with a smile that froze him, that she could not remember, and added that, as it was not her intention to make any further reference to the proceedings at Plantagenet House, she requested to know what was the subject of importance he was desirous of communicating to her, and for which purpose he had sought her in the garden upon the evening previously.

He mused for a moment, and then fixing his eyes steadfastly upon her, he said that he wished to visit Beachborough Abbey, to examine its condition, and receive a report respecting some necessary alterations which were required; he asked her if she had any hesitation to accompany him.

She returned his look by one as steadfast, and answered:

"No."

"When will your ladyship be prepared to attend me?" he asked.

"Within an hour, if you wish it," she replied, coldly but promptly.

He was thunderstruck. He, however, made her no reply beyond telling her that, at the expiration of the hour, he should be awaiting her.

In two hours from that time, they were on their way to Beachborough.

On the day following their arrival, the Mar-



quis sought the Marchioness in her chamber and he locked the door behind him; and begging her to pay close attention to all he said, he related to her the history of Fanny Shelley as it had been repeated to him by the landlord of the True Lover's Knot, and the story of the child as related to him by Dr. Bird. He informed her further, that he had in his possession a miniature of the Earl of Brackleigh when Viscount Bertram, and that he knew it had belonged to her. But, strangely enough, he forgot to mention the envelope of white satin and the lock of hair. His mind, indeed, was too much engrossed by the idea of an intrigue being yet carried on between the Earl of Brackleigh and the Marchioness. He said very much that bore upon his own suspicions, and he called upon her, now that she was beneath that roof, to either confess her guilty depravity, or disprove the terrible imputation cast upon her.

She heard him coldly and calmly to the end; and then she laconically replied, that she had listened to him with the contempt that she entertained for the meanness which had urged him to seek for falsehoods among tattling beersellers and drugmongers; that she considered it beneath her dignity to return him any reply further than she was now doing, and that, under any and all circumstances, she defied him.

He, white with vindictive rage, held up a key to her.

"You and your maid are prisoners in this abbey," he said fiercely, "until I clear up this mystery. You shall either remain my Marchioness, spotless, and of untarnished reputation, or I will discard you from me with loathing and disgust.

He quitted the room hastily, and locked the door.

For nearly three weeks, Constance was kept with her maid, Fane, a close prisoner; and though outwardly she appeared calm, she was almost frenzied in her mind, because she believed that the Marquis would search her private cabinet in her chamber in London; and that there he would find the original certificate of her marriage with Bertram.

Every effort at escape appeared hopeless; for the Marquis had taken his precautions so well, that only his paid people were in custody of the chambers which contained the Marchioness, and they thought they were keeping guard over a lunatic.

Yet Fane's pretty face, and just one kiss of her soft cheek, enabled her one morning to get a letter forwarded to Nat; and on the following night, Nat made a burglarious entrance into the abbey by means of skeleton keys. By his aid, the Marchioness and Fane escaped from their imprisonment; the Earl of Brackleigh being ready to receive the Marchioness under the gloomy shadow of the abbey walls.

On receiving the Marchioness in his arms, Bertram urged her ardently to fly with him; but she said she would give him no answer until she had first visited Westchester House.

she, however, intimated that, if able to secure some important papers which were secreted in a place known only to herself, she would probably join her father to him, and with him turn her back on England forever.

They reached London in safety, and there parted. The Marchioness proceeded to Westchester House, which she entered with Fane, receiving the same attention as usual from the servants.

She hastened to her suite of apartments, and at once and alone to the one which contained her cabinet. She, to her great surprise, found it locked and the key removed.

In her despair, she knew not what to do. She was obliged to remain quiet; for she feared that, by ordering the door to be forced, she should cause a talk and commotion in the house.

The secret services of Nat were again called in requisition, after some consideration by her, through Fane, who introduced him into the house surreptitiously; and he, after examining the lock, promised in three days to open the door, and with a key, too.

Hagar Lot, who in the interim visited the Marchioness, became acquainted with this fact by the admission of the latter, who believed that Hagar, who seemed to have the power of entering the house whenever she pleased, could enter any room at will. This, however, proved a feat which Hagar could not perform; but it was the means of her carrying out a purpose.

Nat kept his word: he arrived on the third night with a peculiarly-made skeleton-key; with which he unlocked the door.

The Marchioness, on finding that she could obtain admission to the room, dismissed Fane and Nat, and commenced and continued a long search for her marriage-certificate. While thus engaged, she fancied she heard the fall of a soft footstep behind her.

She turned hastily, and beheld, standing not far from the door, a young, tall, pale, beautiful girl, whose features she instantly recognized as the counterpart of her own.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Soft as descending wings fell the calm of the hour on her spirit;  
Something within her said: 'At length thy trials are ended';  
And with light in her looks, she entered the chamber."  
—LONGFELLOW.

When Floret was pushed rather than ushered into the room where the Marchioness was standing, the latter had been engaged for more than two hours in searching for what she could not find.

At first she made a hurried investigation of the contents of her cabinet without success. She made a second, a third, each being performed with a kind of wild rapidity, but vainly.

Fully conscious of the importance of securing the articles for which she was looking so anxiously, she made a call upon her courage,



her firmness, and the determination which she naturally possessed, but which a long-continued mental struggle had greatly weakened, and recommenced her search coolly and carefully. Not a piece of folded paper passed her unopened, or if it contained writing, unread; not a drawer or secret place in the cabinet was permitted to escape her unexamined, and when, with a sinking heart and drooping spirit, she became convinced that the objects of her search were no longer in the places in which she was sure that she had deposited them, she pushed open the drawers, and examined other drawers, desks, and spaces, probable and improbable, until she arrived at the complete and terrible certainty that what she was hunting for had all been abstracted: the miniature, the little lock of hair, and the stolen marriage-register.

It was at the moment that this horrifying conviction was forcing itself upon her mind that she heard a footstep behind her, and simultaneously felt a presentiment that it was the Marquis; but, turning, beheld instead a young girl, tall, fair, delicate, and curiously like herself.

Yet she was a stranger; and to see a stranger in such a place, and at such a moment, was a marvel, which, for an instant, bewildered her.

She drew herself up with queen-like majesty, and awaited an explanation of this extraordinary intrusion.

While she did so, her eyes were fastened upon the young girl's face, and her mind ran about with her in a curious, chaotic, confused way. The features were strange, and yet familiar—they were unknown to her, and yet she fancied that she had seen them every day.

Mixed up with the perusal of her features, were woodland scenes, and sequestered places: flitting faces, the dark visage of Hagar Lot, the ghastly countenance—pretty, pallid, and careworn—of Fanny Shelley, whose spectral, inquiring eyes were seldom absent from her vision; there were sounds and noises of cries and shouts in her ears, of a bell slowly booming, and of the rushing of an excited and eager multitude: sights and sounds which rose unbidden, as though they were so many phantom suggestions offering themselves, so that she might, by their aid, be able to discover who it was who stood before her.

Not less close, eager, and anxious, was the perusal of the face of the Marchioness by Floret.

Her heart seemed to have momentarily stayed its beating, and an equally wild throng of sounds and sights rushed through her brain and mental vision, as she gazed on the beautiful and haughty countenance before her.

To her eyes the face of the Marchioness was familiar as her own—familiar, because she had often dreamed of such a face even in her childhood; and since she had seen one closely resembling it on the Cup-day at Ascot Races, every incident of which was strongly imprinted upon her memory. It was the face of the proud

lady who had tossed her a sovereign, and whose scornful treatment of her had cost her so many bitter recollections.

And this was the woman whom she was to claim as a parent. A creature behind whose mask of beauty, purity, and high station, she knew not how much of sin, of shame, and crime, was concealed.

But beneath the high white brow, she saw that the beautiful eyes were sunken and unnaturally bright; the cheek was thin, and round the mouth were lines traced only by the most bitter mental suffering.

This reflection appealed to her warmest and tenderest sympathy, for she had herself suffered so deeply. And she felt that her firmness, her resolution to be calm, cold, and dignified, were giving way rapidly. Instinctively, she removed her bonnet, so that her fair, long, curling tresses fell unrestrained upon her shoulders.

Yet more amazed at this movement, the Marchioness, whose heart was beating wildly, and whose perturbed feelings at this unlooked-for apparition were incomprehensible, said in a low, bewildered tone.

"What is the meaning of this strange intrusion? Who are you?"

Floret fell upon her knees at her feet, and clutching at her dress, turned her face up to her, and with streaming eyes ejaculated, in a low, soft, quivering voice, which no description could realize:

"Mother!"

With a wild, frantic screech, the Marchioness tore her dress from the hands of Floret, and staggered to a settee, and sank upon it half insensible.

Upon her knees, Floret followed her, saying, still in piteous, beseeching tones:

"Mother, I am your child. Mother, do not disown me, do not discard me. In mercy, in pity, do not deny me. In the name of Him who made you and all the world, be merciful to me, as you hope hereafter for mercy from Him!"

The Marchioness pressed her hands on her temples, before her eyes, over her ears; she rose up and flung Floret from her, and rushed to a bell; but again Floret clung to her, crying:

"Spurn me not, I am your child! One word, mother! one word to me!"

The Marchioness turned to her, with a face ghastly, panic-stricken, maddened in its expression. With glaring eyes she thrust at her, and cried, in hoarse, almost inarticulate tones:

"Begone! quit my sight! leave me! This is some infamous plot hatched against me. Begone! brat, wretch, or I will curse you! Begone, beggar!"

With a cry of anguish, of acute misery, Floret rose up.

She, too, pressed her hands upon her temples, before her eyes, twisted her wrists about her neck, and writhed in a paroxysm of mortal agony.

Then she flung her hands down and clenched



them, and she drew her figure up to her full height.

"Woman!" she cried, with a quivering, scornful, bitter expression, which made the Marchioness, whose hand was again upon the bell, start and pause, "woman! you shall hear me! I came here to implore justice: I remain here now to demand it!"

The lips of the Marchioness moved, and she muttered something inaudible.

"Look upon me," continued Floret, speaking with a firmness, clearness, and energy which contrasted remarkably with her previous softness and tenderness; "examine my features, scrutinize them well, and when you have done so, tell me if you know them."

Again the Marchioness would have spoken, and have made an impatient gesture for her to quit the apartment, but lips and tongue both seemed paralyzed.

"Tell me," continued Floret, sternly, "if you recognize in them the features of your dependent, murdered foster-sister, Fanny Shelley? Do they resemble them? Speak without equivocation—am I like Fanny Shelley so much as to be her child? Mark me, woman!" she cried, pointing solemnly upward; "Almighty God is looking down upon us! In His presence I call upon you to answer me truly—am I Fanny Shelley's child?"

The Marchioness cowered and bowed her head. She could not, in the face of God, tell a lie so tremendous.

"You are silent—you shrink—you know that it is false!" pursued Floret, speaking with an intense energy. "And to whom did you willfully and deliberately repeat that falsehood?—my father, and your husband, the Earl of Brackleigh?"

The Marchioness gazed at her aghast, but by a mighty effort she endeavored to recall her self-command, and gasping for breath, she murmured, huskily:

"How dare you utter the wild, incoherent assertions to me? Begone! I know you not?"

"I dare do this, and more; for you disown me—I, who have been so long and so hopelessly the victim of your cruelty—and I will not go!" returned Floret, excitedly. "Listen to me; know me for that child whom you saw at Beachborough, a poor, pauper girl; know me for that child whom you saw playing the part of a miserable beggar upon a race course, when you were seated in a carriage surrounded by the titled and the noble, the worshiped and honored above those to whom such homage is paid; know me for that same child who has been reared by your directions under the tender auspices of Hagar Lot, the weird gipsy, who is using your secrets to work her own ends—who has you in her power—and will, unless I, the despised, disowned outcast, step in to save you; destroy you; know me for that person who, while sheltered for a time with tenderness and compassion by the Countess of Brackleigh, was informed by the Earl, with wickedness and cruelty, under your inspira-

tion, that your foster-sister was deceived and betrayed by a man of high birth—that a child was born—and that I was that child! Do you know me now?"

She stood with her form erect, and with her head elevated, as, with a proud dignity, she uttered the last interrogatory.

The Marchioness, from the first, had been completely overwhelmed by what she heard from Floret's lips. It was not alone that she was thunderstricken by her most unexpected appearance, but a thousand fears and horrible anticipations rushed through her mind. If the Countess of Brackleigh knew all, the world would know all. The Marquis would hear her story—perhaps had heard it—and, for aught she knew, was without now, awaiting the result of this girl's interview with her. Wishal, there was a wild tugging at her heart to catch this intruder to her breast, acknowledge her, reveal all to her, but implore her to keep her secret.

Yet, how was it to be kept! The world would know of her existence through the Countess of Brackleigh; and, if she were weak enough to deny her own legitimacy, the world would insist upon it for her; inquiries would be made, and the felon's dock would yawn to receive her!

What was she to do but brave it out as long as she could, and escape from England before the storm burst! She remained for some time silent after Floret had paused, revolving all these thoughts in her distracted brain. She saw, however, now that her first bewilderment and confusion had in some small degree subsided, that it would be madness to summon her servants and create a scene, which would only add to the mischief already brewing, and perhaps precipitate an unfavorable denouement.

She, therefore, with another powerful effort to subdue her perturbation, and appear cold and immovable, turned slowly to Floret, but she did not fix her eyes upon her face.

"I know you only for the person you declare yourself to be, excepting that audacious declaration of being allied to me," she exclaimed, addressing her in low, measured, frigid tones; "but even that does not give you the right to obtrude yourself upon me. I can hardly imagine that you have taken this step unaided, nor can I suppose that the design of entering this place surreptitiously, and urging the most monstrous claim ever conceived upon me, originated with you. I might summon my servants and have you expelled, and even consigned to the custody of the police, but I have compassion on your youth and your sex; and I believe that you are the child of Shelley, who was to me, I am always ready to acknowledge, a faithful and devoted attendant. I therefore spare you the ignominy of forcible expulsion; and I may feel disposed, perhaps, when you have some proper notion of the wildness of your present conduct, to promote your interests in some way, so that you may live in a decent and



respectable manner, and not descend to such artifices as these, in the hope to wring from me some paltry hush-money."

A groan, rather than a sob, escaped from Floret's lips.

"Reflect," added the Marchioness, fancying for the moment that she had made an impression upon her mind favorable to her views, "and you will see the advantage of communicating to me the names of the persons who instigated you to take the mad and wicked step of to-night."

"If your heart were not of adamant you would never have consigned me to the fate you have," responded Floret, with deep emotion. "You would not see me stand thus before you and address me in such heartless terms—nay, you would not have committed one single deed of the many which now lay heavy upon your soul. Poor, murdered Fanny Shelley was your faithful, devoted attendant; you acknowledge that. She sacrificed her life for you—you must feel that, although you are justly not responsible for her death; and in reward for her faithful devotion—assuming that I am her child—how did you act toward me? You suffered me to remain a dependent for existence upon some poor villagers. You caused me to be kidnapped by a gipsy, by whom I was conveyed to a miserable, squalid den, and doomed to pass my young life a shoeless, wandering beggar. Your imagination, moving in high life as you have been, petted and pampered, can form no conception of the miseries I have been compelled to endure by you; and for what?—not that I was the child of poor Shelley, but that I was your child, the unacknowledged offspring of a secret marriage between you and Viscount Bertram—"

"I will not listen to these preposterous inventions," interposed the Marchioness, furiously.

"But you must, Madam; and you must listen to them from me," interrupted Floret, in her turn.

She spoke with such firm determination, that the Marchioness felt compelled to remain silent.

"It is better that they should fall like blistering hail upon your ears from my lips, than they should be thundered into them from the mouths of others. What I am about to say to you, if you refuse to hear, I may reveal to others. My honor and my position cannot suffer; yours must. I may live in future humbly, but, at least, I shall live in honor. Now, mark me, Madam; I have not much to say to you, but the little shall be to the purpose, and if you decline to acknowledge me for whom I am when I have ended, I will take my way and you will take yours. We shall meet again at last, that I feel, but under less happier auspices than might have been the case had you treated me with more womanly consideration. You deny your marriage, Madam, with the Viscount Bertram. Are you prepared to deny that you went to Brighton some years back alone; that you proceeded alone to St.

Mary's Church, Hove; that you inquired of the clerk of that church for the book of the register of marriages—"

"My God!" involuntarily ejaculated the Marchioness.

"That you inspected the book in the absence of the clerk," pursued Floret, with marked emphasis; "that you extracted a leaf containing one of the entries; and that you then returned to Raby Hall?"

She paused; the Marchioness looked at her with a bewildered aspect. She only too well remembered that she had visited Brighton, but she remembered that she had gone there alone, and had concealed from every person breathing what she did upon that occasion. How could this girl know anything of what had occurred? Yet she had described what had taken place accurately. She gazed steadfastly at her.

"This is mere assertion," she said, hesitatingly.

"I have that abstracted leaf in my possession," retorted Floret, emphatically. "It is right that you should know with how much of my history I am acquainted."

"So, then, this register had been stolen from her escritoir—and by whom?"

Her thoughts instantly reverted to Hagar Lot: probably she had employed some gipsy to watch her, and he might have followed her to Brighton. This was her rapid impression, and like those of her sex, being instinctive, it was quite near enough to the truth. Then a thought struck her, and she said, instantly, with a forced species of triumphant smile:

"The scheme has been cleverly concocted; but you prove too much. Had I committed the act with which you have charged me, that leaf of the register would have been in my possession, not yours."

"It was in your possession, Madam," replied Floret, coldly; "but it is now properly in mine, for it will help to prove that I am—"

"And assist to ruin me if you succeed in establishing yourself to be the offspring of that marriage," observed the Marchioness, in a half soilology. Then she added, impatiently and angrily, "I wonder that I have listened to you so long—I, however, command you now to retire, or—"

"You have done me injury enough," interrupted Floret, quickly; "you can hardly desire to add to the long list."

She folded her hands across her bosom, and added, slowly and sorrowfully:

"I will leave you, Madam, with much unsaid that I had intended to say; it is, perhaps, as well as it is. The voice of Nature has whispered to me even while we have been speaking. I could have forgiven all that has passed, all that I have borne—have met all that I may have to bear with fortitude and resignation. I would have preserved your secret even to my own destruction, if you had but said one kind word to me, bestowed upon me one tender look—had pressed your lip to mine only once, and whispered in my ear 'thou art my



child!" You have acknowledged not one urging of even common humanity; and so I take my departure from you, resolved to devote my energies to the task which you denounce. I yearned only when I entered here that you should know me, that I might call you mother, and you confess me—if only to myself—to be your child; but now the world shall know me for whom I am, and—"

At this moment, Fane, the Marchioness's attendant, rushed into the room, and exclaimed, hurriedly:

"My Lady! my Lady! the Marquis is approaching, my Lady!"

She was accompanied by Hagar Lot, who, at the same moment, caught Floret by the wrist, and said to her:

"You must accompany me!"

Floret threw off her hand haughtily; and then, forgetting all she had just uttered, ran to the Marchioness. With a wild gesture she flung herself at her feet:

"One word!" she said, in half-choked accents. "One word—one little word!"

The Marchioness remained motionless, though her lips moved quickly, and her bosom heaved and fell with violent rapidity, betraying how deep was her inward emotion.

"Do not drive me from you without a word!" urged Floret, wildly. "One little word will seal my lips forever; though it forces me to sacrifice everything that makes life so lovely to the young!"

But the Marchioness stood immovable.

Fane uttered an ejaculation, and, in a low voice, muttered:

"We are lost!"

Floret turned her face to the doorway, and beheld standing in it the Marquis of Westchester.

The room swam round with her, and she saw no more.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"She look'd on many a face with vacant eye,

On many a token without knowing what;

She saw them watch her, without knowing why,

And reck'd not who around her pillow sat;

Not speechless, though she spoke not; n't a sigh

Reliev'd her thoughts; dull silence and quick chat

Were tried in vain by those who served—she gave

No sign, save breath, of having left the grave."

—BYRON.

The situation, when the Marquis of Westchester made his appearance at the door of the Marchioness's apartment, was one of profound embarrassment to every one present who had their senses about them.

The Marquis, who had entered the house by a side and private entrance, was unconscious of the arrival of the Marchioness and her maid in London, and had been observed stealthily approaching the former's apartments by Fane, who promptly rushed to her mistress to acquaint her with his coming. His intention was to prosecute a similar search to that in which the Marchioness had been engaged, and he was not a little disconcerted on arriving at the door of the apartment to find it open

readily to his touch, and to discover himself almost at the same moment likely to be the hero of a scene.

He was absolutely bewildered at seeing before him the Marchioness and Fane, both of whom he believed to be in close custody at Beachborough; but his surprised eyes were attracted almost as immediately by the form of a young girl in a swoon being snatched, as it were, from the floor by a woman, whose dark face and darker eyes and hair proclaimed her to be one of a race whom he held in the greatest abhorrence.

The Marchioness was confounded by his presence, for before her, senseless, was her unacknowledged daughter—inquiries respecting whom by the Marquis must, she knew, prove fatal to her. Fane's embarrassment may be easily conceived, while Hagar Lot was both disconcerted by the presence of the Marquis, who had never before seen her in his mansion, and disturbed by the marring of the object for which she had brought Floret thither. Suggestions of a deadly description, which she had intended to have whispered in the ear of the Marchioness, were rendered unavailable by the unlooked-for appearance of the Marquis, and she instinctively felt that it would be more than awkward to have to offer an explanation to him of her presence there, if he called upon her to do so.

She was the first, however, to recover her presence of mind. She stooped over Floret's inanimate form, shrouded her face with a part of her cloak, and lifting her up with no common exertion of strength, she glided into an inner apartment, and thence by a door into a corridor. With the celerity of volition of the serpent, and with as noiseless movement, she descended with her still senseless burden into the garden, leaving the Marchioness to give the explanations he might require in any shape she could best at the moment devise. She hurried with Floret, who was yet insensible, to the almost impenetrable darkness of the shadow of a clump of trees. She laid her carefully upon the cool grass, and returned swiftly to lock the door by which she had quitted the house, the key of which the Marchioness had intrusted to her.

On her return, she was unable to find Floret. She stretched her hands in all directions over the grass, but could discover no trace of her; she called her by name, in a low, soft voice, but received no answer. She searched carefully and cautiously in every direction, but the neighboring church-bell tolled the hour of midnight, and she had failed to meet with the slightest clue which would guide her to an opinion as to what had become of her.

So sudden had been Hagar's departure with Floret that she had disappeared before the Marquis had the presence of mind to stop her. Hagar, however, had not been so quick with the disposition of her cloak over Floret's face but that the Marquis had seen it, and that with an emotion which almost paralyzed him. Before he could recover himself, Hagar had



hidden it and quitted the room. He made a movement as though he would rush after her, but the Marchioness placed herself before him.

"Stand out of my way, woman," he cried passionately, as he raised his hand, "or"—

Her clear, bright blue eye fastened itself upon his, as, beside himself with fury, he made that mad gesture. It sparkled so brilliantly that it dazzled him, it restored him at once to a consciousness of the extraordinary impropriety of which he was about to be guilty, and he absolutely shuddered as a perception of the debased position into which his suspicions of the Marchioness and her treatment of him were hurrying him.

She with a stern dignity of manner, turned from him to Fane, and said to her:

"Quit the room!"

Fane courtied low and slunk out of the apartment, only too glad to get away.

As soon as she was gone, the Marchioness addressed the Marquis, who was yet standing with an irresolute manner before her, and said, in a low, deliberate voice, and yet so full of emotion that every note quivered as she uttered it:

"You wooed me like a sycophant. You took me as a virtuoso secures a rarity. You were not particular respecting the terms, so that you made me yours—that is, yours in the eyes of the world, and not in fact. You were content to palm a lie on the credulity of society, and assume a credit which never has been yours and never will be yours were you to be crowned Emperor of the Universe and to live for an eternity. You have been mean enough to be content with the phantom of a woman, and now you seek to tyrannize over the reality, as if you had a legal claim to do so. You have insulted me by making me a prisoner in my own house; mine, Marquis of Westchester—for Beacborough Abbey, settled solely upon me, without leaving you a right, a title, or claim upon it, was not a place in which you could exercise even the poor authority of a menial. You have degraded me before the eyes of your base tools, upon the strength of a vile suspicion. Lord Westchester, from the first you have commenced the irreconcilable strife which has now reached such formidable proportions between us. You have taken the initiative, and you have dared to speak to me, to act to me, as though every degrading and disgusting impression originated by the prurient subtleties of a depraved mind, which has presented itself to you, had been and is true. You have not waited to prove my guilt, if guilty am, or to ascertain beyond doubt my innocence. You have assumed the first, and have decided that the latter must be impossible. Lord Westchester, it is hard to be wrongly suspected; it is harder still to be treated as though suspicions were facts; it is yet harder to endure the indignity of such suspicions, which no insult can surpass, if equal, in magnitude. I cannot endure it. I will not. The torture is inflics upon me is inconceivable by you. But pain for pain!

I will retaliate with the weapons which you have yourself placed in my hands. You shall not suspect me in vain. When a woman becomes reckless of her own self-respect and regardless of the honor of her husband, the profligacy of a case-hardened libertine is purity beside her depravity. You have reproached me with iniquity. I will be iniquitous. I courted the possession of your coronet, and I made many bitter sacrifices to obtain it; since it has been placed upon my brow, slander dared not approach me with its venomous breath. Some of your most cherished friends who have sought to debase me, and to dishonor you, have proclaimed the immaculateness of your honor through me, at the expense of acknowledging their own looseness of morality. The strongest partisans of prudery elevated me to their standard of spotless purity. For what have I won this distinction—to be outraged by you with infamous suspicions and to the most degrading treatment. I have worn your circlet of peerage as a Diana; it shall henceforth deck my forehead as a Lais. I will drag it through the slimy froth that bubbles on the festering lips of corrupt talkers. I will trail it through such paths of shameful lewdness that the pure shall shudder at its approach, and the wanton blush as she shrinks abashed in its presence—"

"Madwoman!" cried the Marquis, frantically, after several attempts to stay the voluble expression of her terrible sentiments.

"Ay, I am mad," she cried, shrilly and wildly, gradually increasing the vehemence of her tone in her fearful excitement. "I am mad, and you have made me so. I know that you will try to arrest me in my progress to the destruction of your name and of my fame; but you shall not. I am your wife—that is, in the eyes of the law, so long as it pleases me that it shall be so—and that is a tie which you cannot sunder with a puff of wind. What, is it come to this? I, who sold my life, my youth, my beauty to you for a ring of fire, which has been consuming my brain ever since it pressed like a curse upon my temples! I—I—am I to be treated like a slave, taunted with the commission of a filthy sin, to be abused like a menial, and incarcerated like a felon? I—I! a Plantagenet!—and by you, a creature whom I hate, I loathe, I abhor!—a wretched shadow, a mockery!—the meanest epitome of a man that ever offended my eyes!—a brass crown hovering over an empty ermined robe; a—ha! ha! a—the obd of a hair-dresser and a titled mother! a—ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!"

She tossed her arms madly about as she went into a fit of shrieking hysterics, sending forth peal after peal of piercing screams, until the whole household, wondering and affrighted, entered her chamber and beheld her dashing herself wildly about on the floor, and the Marquis standing petrified and paralyzed.

The united strength of several female domestics could barely restrain the Marchioness



from inflicting upon herself serious injuries, until she subsided into a convulsive swoon, awful to look upon.

She was borne instantly to her chamber by her maids, and medical assistance was instantly summoned.

The Marquis, at the same time, staggered, faint and breathless, to his study, where, an hour afterward, his valet discovered him stretched upon the carpet, with every sign of death imprinted upon his pallid, drawn features.

During the time this terrible scene was being enacted, Floret was borne, in the careful arms of Liper Leper, from the spot where Hagar Lot had placed her, to one which was beyond the precincts of the Marquis's grounds.

In the interval which elapsed between his meeting with Floret at the abode of Daddy Windy and this night, he had contrived to ascertain that the house of the Earl of Brackleigh was the one which Hagar Lot had so closely watched, and he haunted it like a shadow, watching the movements of the Countess wherever she went, until, on the afternoon of the day upon which he was to conduct Floret to an interview with her mother, he followed her to a house in Pimlico, which she entered. From an upper window he caught sight of the face of Ida, with an anxious expression upon it, peering out; and he, having discovered the object of his search, gave up further attendance on the Countess, and proceeded to his appointment with Floret.

He said not a word to her respecting the discovery he had made; but now that he held her senseless in his arms, he made up his mind what he would do.

The fresh air, and a restorative which he administered, soon revived Floret; but before she could properly collect her thoughts, and know in whose care she was, or remember what had happened, he had engaged a cab and placed her in it, mounting the box with the driver, as before.

To the house of Mr. Spencer he made the man drive with rapidity, and as there fortunately happened to be no impediments in their route, they very soon reached their destination.

While the vehicle was yet proceeding, Liper Leper slipped off the box, and ran swiftly on to the house, and rang the bell sharply and even violently.

Almost the next instant, the cab drove up, but simultaneously the door of Mrs. Spencer's tenement opened, and Bob made a brisk appearance, closely followed by Ida and Mrs. Spencer, all having been startled by the loud peal on the bell.

Bob butted his head inside the cab, and with a species of spasmodic whoop, he gasped out:

"Ehah! I—I—think so!"

How Floret got out, or was got out of the cab, and borne into the house, she never knew; and we are sure that no one there could at that moment, or at any subsequent period,

have lucidly enlightened her upon the point. She only knew that Ida was embracing her with sobs and cries of joy, while Bob was promenading round the room as if waiting for his turn to succeed Ida in affectionate acknowledgments. If this surmise was correct, he proved too impatient to wait, for he suddenly seized his aunt, and gave her such a hug, that when he released her, she insisted that he was much too strong in his manifestations of ecstasy, and if he went on in that way to Susan's tall sister, whose acquaintance he had just made, and to whom he had made declarations of a perennial affection, he would have to attend a coroner's inquest upon her before he married her.

Poor Floret was overwhelmed by these testimonies of delight at her recovery, and as soon as she could recover anything like self-possession, she inquired for Liper Leper, to whom, she informed them, she owed her return to Pimlico.

Everybody had forgotten the cab and its driver, and a general rush was made to the door, but cab and driver were gone, and no one else was visible—Liper Leper had, therefore, gone, too, without waiting to be even thanked.

Floret was disappointed, but she knew there was much yet to be done, and that Liper Leper would not desert her until her fate was settled in one way or the other.

Bob, after he had pacified his aunt, by telling her he would never strain her to his heart with such vigor again, and that when he folded Susan's sister to his bosom he would do it with a milder violence, offered his congratulations to Floret, and informed her that she had reached Pimlico in the very "nick of time". He told her that Susan Atten, now Mrs. Harry Vere, was back again from Canada, and in London, residing only a street or two off. He confessed that it was too late that night to go and see her, but he entreated her to accompany him in the morning to Susan's residence, for she was very anxious that they should meet, not only because that she was deeply attached to her from having reared her from infancy to childhood, but because he believed now that she could materially influence her future.

Floret shook her head despondently, but she readily gave him the required promise, for she was glad to hear of Susan's return to England; and he then, in a state of gleefulness which it was pleasant to behold, took his departure.

But not until he had given to Mrs. Spencer another but more modified embrace, and had winked at her roguishly, saying:

"That's the sort of double harness-fold for Em'ly, eh, aunt? I think so!"

Meaning, by Em'ly the aforesaid Susan's sister.

When Floret retired with Ida to their sleeping chamber—how deliciously clean, and sweet, and large it seemed to that which she had inhabited in Daddy Windy's house—Ida



again embraced her, welcoming her back again with kisses oft and oft repeated.

The little Indian child, too, disturbed by the noise of their entry, rose up in its bed, and on seeing Floret, clapped its little hands, and smiled with joy. Floret embraced it tenderly, and a thought that, though she might be discarded by those who ought to cherish and protect her, there was yet something to live for, passed through her brain.

And then again Ida stole her arm around her waist, and said, in a soft whisper:

"Dear—dear Edith, I have so much to tell you about—whom do you think?"

Floret sighed; she was too depressed for efforts of memory.

"I cannot think," she said.

"Nay, make a guess," urged Ida.

"Indeed, my mind is in a whirl, dear Ida," she responded, sadly, "and I have not the spirit to hazard even the simplest suggestion."

"Well, then," said Ida, with heightening color, "Lord Victor!"

Floret turned sharply and swiftly to her, and said, with an expression of acute pain upon her features:

"Do not mention that name to me, Ida, if you love me. Do not repeat it to me if you would ever have me speak to you again."

Ida gazed at her earnestly, and her eyes became suffused with tears.

"You are so strange in your notions, dear Edith," she said, with a kind of pitiful pout of the lip; "why should I not speak to you of him?"

"You shall know some day—sooner, perhaps, than you expect," said Floret, and passed her hand over her eyes, adding: "Let us retire to rest, Ida, dearest, for I am very, very weary and sick at heart."

Floret slept not that night. Her mind was racked with agony at the remembrance of the interview with her mother. Every chilling glance, every freezing word, every insulting epithet she had flung at her she recalled, only to inflict upon herself fresh poignancy of grief.

In the morning she arose pale and unfreshed; but though weak and ill, she remembered her promise to Bob, and dressed herself to be ready to attend his summons.

Bob was round very early, and was very fussy, and very nervous. He seemed to have many gulps in his throat, and tears started frequently into his eyes, as though his mind was more occupied with events elsewhere, than with those in which he was taking part.

But as soon as Floret declared herself ready to depart with him, he bowed to her, as though he did not aspire to the honor of offering her his arm; and he marched off before her with very much of the grandeur and the dignity which a Lord Mayor would display when marching in front of a charming Princess of Wales.

Upon reaching Little Elizabeth street, Bob paused before the residence of Susan, and was

about to give a loud rat-a-tat-tat upon the knocker, but the door was opened before he could commence his performance, and Mrs. Henry Vere stood in the doorway.

She gazed wistfully and earnestly at Floret; for she was now so tall, and in her neat and tasteful attire looked so elegant and lady-like, that the impulse she felt to fold her in her arms and press her to her heart was checked.

Floret, however, soon settled her hesitation; for she flung her arms about her neck, and much as a sorrowful child would in the arms of its mother, sobbed upon her neck.

"Poor Girl, Poor Girl!" murmured Susan, with quivering lips. "How have you been made to suffer; but God will help us, and all will come right at last."

"I am very weak!" said Floret, plaintively, "very weak and depressed just now, but I shall be stronger and firmer in the time to come."

Bob hinted that looking at the sun made his eyes water, and he could not think what made him such a fool as to stare at it, for he was compelled to wipe his eyes several times after doing it.

"You have not forgotten Harry," said Susan to Floret, with a sudden blush.

"Indeed I have not, for he was very kind to me," returned Floret.

"He only did his duty by thee, lass," exclaimed suddenly a voice close behind Susan. "He promised Sussey that he would do't by thee, an' he has, lass; he has as far maybe as he can—God help us all."

Harry Vere was the speaker, and Floret instantly recognized him. She held out both her hands, and he shook them warmly.

"Coom in, lass," he added, in an undertone; "coom in, till I bring thee to others as want to see thee—coom in!"

Floret passed into the small hall, and followed Susan, who led the way up a flight of stairs. As they reached the door of the apartment, Susan turned, and said to her in a whisper, and with much emotion:

"Floret, dear, dear Floret, if ever you had control over your firmness, courage, and strength of mind, exert it now. Prepare for strange events. There is within here an invalid."

She opened the door gently, and ushered Floret into the room.

The latter glanced timidly round her, and beheld, seated by the window, a tall, thin man, with a bronzed face, whose features were stern and careworn; by his side sat a female, whose countenance, perfectly colorless, was yet young in its aspect, and very pretty. Her rich brown hair was parted plainly across her temples, and her deep, earnest, brown eyes were fixed upon vacancy.

As Floret gazed on both, filled with a wonder and an agitation for which she could not account, Susan, moving Floret slightly forward, said, in a low, trembling voice, as if by way of introduction:



"This is the Poor Girl!"

The tall, stern-faced man, partly rose up to greet her; but his face changed as his glittering eyes fell on her face, to a ghastly yellow, and groaning, he sank down in his seat again, and turning his head away, he covered his eyes with his hand.

Susan, with streaming eyes and faltering voice, continued, as she turned to the bewildered Floret, and pointed to the man:

"That, Floret, is—is—is Harry's brother, Stephen Vere."

She paused as if to draw breath, as if to find power to articulate, and then she pointed to the female, who had not moved from her position, or altered the direction of her eyes when Floret entered, and said:

"This—this — O Floret!—this is Fanny Shelley!"

With a scream—with a gasp, Floret fell fainting to the ground.

Susan caught her up, and sobbing, folded her to her bosom.

"Floret," she cried, "Floret, have courage—have mercy upon us—for God's sake, for all our sakes, be firm—look up, look up—O Harry!—Harry!—Stephen, she's dying!—she's dying!"

Poor Floret, she was not proof against this unlooked-for shock, any more than she had been against her mother's cruel repulse of her, and it was some time before their united efforts could restore her to consciousness.

Susan had conveyed her to her own room, and had not ceased in her efforts to bring her round. Bob, in his fright, had dashed off for the doctor, the same gentleman who had so kindly attended her after her escape from the fire, and fortunately met him as he was proceeding to attend an elderly gentleman, who, having been attacked by a pain in the knuckle-joint of his forefinger, had sent expressly for him that he might examine it, prescribe for it, and decide whether it would be the proper thing for him to keep his bed for a week or so on account of it.

Bob seized on the doctor, and in spite of remonstrances and struggles, conveyed him to Susan's abode, and did not release him until he had landed him safely in Susan's custody.

Floret, however, was then fast recovering, and was becoming sensible of the circumstances by which she was surrounded. The doctor was soon enabled to hasten her restoration, and as she expressed with much agitation an intense desire to return to the room which contained the long-supposed murdered Fanny Shelley, he undertook to explain a few of the mysteries connected with the latter to her before she saw her again; and he did this with the object of rendering Floret calm, and prepared to go through a no doubt exciting interview with her.

Fanny Shelley in truth it was who was in the adjoining apartment—the same Fanny Shelley who was the foster-sister of, and had been the faithful and devoted attendant of Constance Plantagenet.

And she was mad!

Upon the night she met Stephen Vere, it will be remembered by the reader, that she, while striving to prove her innocence to him, was told by him that, owing to the situation in which the suspicions of the village had placed her, there was nothing but eternal misery before them if they both stayed upon earth, and that, therefore, they would quit it together. She at that instant gazed up into his eyes, and there, as she believed—and, alas! she was not far from the truth—read a design to murder her and himself.

She at once fled away, was pursued by him, fell senseless to the ground, as he, startled by her flight, became sensible of his own wickedness, and when he restored her, she was a maniac!

Not a raving, violent, desperate maniac; but she was pensive, sad, and impressed with a strange belief that she had lost her foster-sister, and it was her mission to wander over the face of the earth in search of her.

Stephen, in his first fright, conveyed her to an outhouse at no great distance, and there tried every means to restore her.

He succeeded, but only to find that she had lost her reason. He conveyed her next to an untenanted cottage, and there kept her closely out of sight for a day, until he could determine what steps to take with respect to her.

A funeral, which took place at Beachborough, suggested a scheme to him, and he carried it out.

He knew that a girl who had died of fever was not unlike Fanny Shelley in face, form, stature, and color of the hair and eyes, and, on the night she was buried, he exhumed the coffin, rifled it of its contents, replaced it, and bore the body to the outhouse to which he had first carried Fanny Shelley.

He then conveyed Fanny, in the night, to Tunbridge Wells, placed her in the care of some people there, and providing her with a change of clothes, he took away those which she had worn, and dressed the corpse in them. He gashed the face and throat, smeared it with some fresh blood which he had provided for the purpose, and then cast it into the brook, with what result is now known.

He contrived, after the Coroner's inquest, to convey Fanny to London, and there again, as she was perfectly harmless, placed her in the custody of a family. Then he returned, and took leave of his family. He came back to London, took Fanny away with him to Liverpool, and thence to Canada, as his sister.

In Canada, he made a confidant of his story to a magistrate, and, for Fanny's sake, a marriage-ceremony was performed. It was strange that she seemed to comprehend the service, and to recognize the words. She even made the responses firmly and collectively, and, when it was ended, kissed Stephen on the forehead, and whispered to him:

"Dear Stephen, I have been true to you; I will be, so long as I may live!"

It was the only lucid interval she had had



in sixteen long years; but all the doctors who had attended her seemed to have hopes that her reason might yet be restored to her.

The medical gentleman whose services Bob had secured, addressing Floret, with some emphasis, said :

"A shock produced it. Sudden excitement may restore her. Upon you, from what I gather, rests the only chance left."

"Let me see her now," said Floret, appealingly.

"Are you strong enough, do you think?" inquired the Doctor.

Floret looked at him. Strong enough! He knew not what depended upon Fanny Shelley's recognition of her; he could not know what energy, what firmness, what determination she could bring to bear upon such an interview, now that the mystery of Fanny's fate had been so strangely and so happily cleared up.

She rose up, she placed her hand in Susan's, and said :

"Take me to her. I am prepared to go through anything now."

Susan took her hand, pressed it, and led her to the room door.

"Do you feel faint?" whispered the Doctor.

"The happiness of my life rests upon her recognition of me. That is my answer," returned Floret, with a quiet energy.

"It is enough," responded the Doctor.

Susan opened the door, and they all slowly entered the room in which still sat Fanny Shelley.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

"A strange emotion stirs within him—more than mere compassion ever walk'd before; Unconsciously he opens his arms, while she Springs forward, as with life's last energy."

—T. MOORE.

Floret, as she entered the apartment, remembered Liper Liper's words to her when recently referring to her history :

"The secret of your birth," he said, "was kept by the Marchioness of Westchester and Fanny Shelley—the latter is dead, the Marchioness alone can furnish the proof you require."

Fanny Shelley was, however, not dead; she was living though not sentient: if her reason could be restored to her, she could furnish the necessary proof, and establish the fact that Floret was the daughter of Lennox Bertram and Constance Neville Plantagenet.

Floret perceived that there was a task before her which would command all her energies, intelligence, and her patience; but she did not quail before it, because she saw Hope in her fairest attire shining beyond her labours.

The Doctor had assured her, too, that there was a possibility of the recovery of Fanny Shelley's senses, and that success depended mainly upon her. She resolved to earn it if she did not conquer it.

These thoughts revolved rapidly in her mind

as she entered the chamber, and as she stood for a moment gazing upon the pale face before her, and the deep brown eyes, bent steadfastly upon vacancy.

Susan knelt down by the side of Fanny, and said in a low voice to her :

"Fanny, dear, will you talk with me?"

For some time she did not reply, as though she did not hear her.

She repeated her question several times, but with a like unsuccessful result.

Then Stephen Vere said a few words to her; but at the sound of his voice she shrank, and cowered, and shuddered.

With a look of pain, he turned his face away, and remained silent.

Then Harry bent forward and said to her :

"Do you know me, Fanny?"

She shook her head slowly.

"I do not know you," she said, in a gentle, plaintive voice. "I am among strangers—always among strangers—I am looking for her."

"Who are you looking for?" asked Harry.

"Aha!" she answered slightly knitting her brows. "I cannot tell you, no—no—no. it is such a dreadful secret. Shall I never find her?"

"Why do you want to find her?" asked Harry quietly.

"I must not tell you, I must not tell any one," she answered, in the same tender, complaining tone. "I would have told Stephen—dear Stephen—but I promised to keep her frightful secret, and I have. Stephen would have killed me, because I would not betray her; and it broke my heart. O! Stephen! Stephen—dear Stephen!—we shall meet in heaven, when our troubles are ended. O, if you had only known how faithful I was to you, and how I loved you—you would have never looked at me so angrily, nor have spoken to me so harshly and unkindly as you did on that dreadful night."

"I cannot bear this," murmured Stephen, with a trembling lip, moving as he would quit the apartment.

Susan stayed him with an entreating gesture.

"For her sake—for your own sake—remain," she whispered.

Then she turned hastily to Floret, and with clasped hands said, beseechingly :

"Speak to her, dear Floret—though but a word. Your voice will sound strange in her ears: it may attract her attention towards you."

"Fanny!" exclaimed Floret, instantly addressing her, in a clear, half-playful tone, which, though assumed, was well adapted to the purpose for which it was intended, "will you not speak to me?"

Fanny started as if under the influence of an electric shock, and murmured :

"That voice—where did that voice come from?"

She turned her head slowly round, and her eyes moved restlessly, but still with a vacant expression.

"Fanny!" repeated Floret, with a beating heart, "look upon me. Have you forgotten me?"



Again Fanny started as though a violent thrill ran through her frame, and her lips moved more rapidly than ever.

Suddenly they encountered Floret's face, and they dilated to an extent which gave to her white countenance an awful expression. They rested there, and her lips moved quickly.

A dead silence reigned in the room, every one held their breath; Floret, though almost appalled by the glare with which Fanny regarded her, did not remove for an instant her eyes from her.

Fanny raised her hand slowly, and passed it over her forehead, then she pressed it upon her eyelids, closing her eyes. Presently she opened them, and again they rested upon Floret's face.

"It is a spectre," she muttered; "it is only a shadow, a mockery, which haunts me."

She clasped her hands, and holding them appealingly to Floret, said:

"Leave me, for you are not real. Go, for you are a shadow. Pity me, pity me! When you appear to me as a shade you pain me. You make my heart ache. Go—go!"

She pressed her hands upon her heart.

"Oh, the agony I suffer!" she continued, in a tone of anguish. "Miss Constance, have mercy. I would have died for you; be merciful to me—depart, and leave me in peace!"

Suddenly, as if influenced by an inspiration Floret, in a rich, sweet, tremulous voice, which moved every one to tears, sang:

"Oranges, sweet oranges,  
Pulpy cheeks that peep through trees."

Fanny listened with a wild, attentive look; and as Floret passed on, concluding the verse, took up the refrain, and sang with a peculiarly soft, silvery tone:

"La, la, sol fa mi,

My lady looked through the orange tree."

She still kept her eye fixed intently upon Floret's face, and rose slowly up and advanced toward her.

Floret, unnerved by her sudden movement, sank affrighted upon a chair.

Fanny instantly placed herself at her feet, and looking fondly in her fair young face, sang in the same low, thrilling tones:

"Yet cheeks there are, yet cheeks there are  
Sweeter—O, good God, how far  
Which makes a thirst like very death,  
Down to the heart through lips and breath  
And if we ask a taste of those.

The kindest owners would turn foes,

La, la, la, sol fa mi,

My lady's gone from the orange tree."

"Gone!" she murmured, plaintively; "gone forever—gone—gone—gone!"

She covered her eyes with her hands, and, bowing her head upon her knees, wept bitterly.

The Doctor raised his hands to direct silence, and Susan forced her hands tightly over her mouth, to keep down her sobs.

The dead silence perhaps had the effect of inducing Fanny to lift her head slowly, and gaze around her.

Again her eyes encountered the face of

Floret, and, rising upon her knees, she stretched out her hand and murmured—

"Not gone—still here? Not gone!"

She touched Floret's hands. A strange, low, hoarse cry burst from her lips. She ran her trembling fingers over Floret's shoulders, her face, her hair.

"Flesh and blood!" she exclaimed, in quivering accents; "real, warm, breathing life—can it be true? Are you no phantom? In the name of Heaven, speak to me?"

"Indeed, indeed, Fanny, I am living, breathing as you see me," answered Floret, in feeble, unsteady tones.

A wild, hysterical laugh burst from her lips.

"Miss Constance, dear Miss Constance, foster-sister!" she exclaimed, as she caught her hands, and kissed them passionately, "we have not been sundered forever, and—"

She paused, and turned her eyes upward, for a figure was bending over her. She gazed steadfastly, but for an instant only. She recognized the face.

She sprang to her feet, shrieking:

"Stephen—Stephen—my own dear, dear Stephen!"

She flung her arms about his neck.

"This is no dream," she cried, wildly; "no cheating of the senses."

"It is reality, my own darling girl!" he responded, as pressing her to his heart, he sobbed like a boy upon her shoulder.

In less almost than a second she drew herself back, and raised his face, so that she could gaze upon it wet as it, was with tears.

"O, yes—yes, it is my Stephen!" she exclaimed, with increasing excitement. "It is you, Stephen, and with looks which are full of love for me still! O, my God, my God! I thank thee—I—I! O, my brain, my brain, it is bursting!"

She screamed as she uttered the last words, and sank senseless, like a log, in Stephen's arms.

The Doctor stepped forward.

"Her reason is restored, I believe!" he exclaimed in a low tone. "But there is much yet to be done, and we must do that much carefully. Lay her gently upon the couch. I will soon bring her back to life. You perceive that she has recognized the two beings she loved most in the world. Their faces must be the first upon which she rests her eyes when she recovers from her swoon; if she still recognizes them, the remainder of our task will be easy. The rest of you had better retire."

Harry shook his brother's hand heartily, and in silence; and then he took Susan in his arms, and kissed her fondly.

Bob gave a low hem! to clear his throat, he dashed the back of his hands across his moistened eyelids, as he fancied, unobserved, and then glided out of the room in search of Emily, in order, we suspect, that he might practice upon her that said "double harness fold".

At least he muttered, as he disappeared with a roguish wink at Susan:



"I think so."

Susan and Harry followed him, leaving only Stephen and Floret alone with the Doctor and Fanny.

Both Stephen and Floret watched with intense eagerness for the signs of returning consciousness, and as Fanny's breast began to heave, and a sigh escaped her lips, the Doctor whispered to Floret:

"Let yours be the first face to meet the gaze of her opening eyes. She has, although unconscious of his identity, been accustomed to see Mr. Vere; but the lady whom you represent has been the constant object of her thoughts during her aberration of intellect, and upon seeing your countenance when she comes out of her swoon, and finds that you are a living, breathing object, it may prevent a relapse. It will be as well for a time to keep up the impression that you are the lady whom she supposes you to be; for if you succeed in making her recognize you, and to talk coherently with you, and she afterward recognizes her husband and converses with him lucidly, though even in a small degree, your battle will be won. The only thing remaining will be to restore her shattered strength; and as her constitution is perfectly sound, a few weeks will not only do that, but bring back her lost memory, leaving only that gap, between the first shock to her reason and now, which nothing but her husband's revelations can fill up."

It may be imagined with what intense anxiety they all watched the signs of returning animation after the Doctor's remarks.

Floret sat by Fanny's side, with her hand in hers, and her face disposed so that the light from the window fell upon it, and it would be the first object which would meet Fanny's gaze.

Stephen and the Doctor stood back and maintained a breathless silence.

Floret perceived the eyelids of Fanny fluttering rapidly, and bending lower still over her, she sang, in a low, touching voice, the refrain of the orange-ballad, which she had only heard from the lips of Lord Victor and Fanny, and which she had treasured in her memory ever since she had heard his rich voice chant it in Trentham wood:

"La, la, la, sol fa mi,  
My lady looked through the orange tree."

As the tones thrilled in Fanny's ears,—for she had so far recovered as to be susceptible to sound—she opened her eyes and fastened them on Floret's face.

She gazed at her thoughtfully for almost a minute without uttering a word; but her throat palpably worked uneasily.

Floret pressed her hand, and exclaimed, in a clear though slightly tremulous tone—

"Fanny, you know me now, I am sure."

Fanny half raised herself, and squeezed her hand almost convulsively:

"O, Miss Constance!" she exclaimed, speaking quickly, and with emotion. "It is really you—I am not dreaming! O, I seem to have worn away a life in one long, horrid

dream—but, thank Heaven, I see you now still a girl—still—I—a"—she cast her eyes rapidly round her, and exclaimed hurriedly, "Where are we? O, Miss Constance, what strange place is this?"

Stephen Vere stepped gently forward, and in a shaking voice, but yet with the utmost tenderness, said;

"Fanny, my girl, you are with me."

She turned her eyes up to his, and held out her hand to him.

"And Stephen, too, dear Stephen, I have had an awful dream of you!" she exclaimed, and checking herself, said abruptly, with another surprised glance around her: "Have I been ill?"

"Yes, very ill," observed the Doctor, stepping forward, and adding, in a professional tone, "You are under my care, and must for some time be kept very quiet, free from all excitement, see no one, and not even talk until I grant you permission. You must not think me harsh and cruel; for it is not only for your own good that I must exact this discipline, but for the sake of those who are most dear to you. You know now that you are surrounded by friends, who will take the greatest care of you, but who will also explain everything to you when you are strong enough to hear all that may have to be told to you."

"You will do what the Doctor so kindly advises, for my sake, will you not, Fanny?" asked Floret, pressing her hand.

Fanny gazed fondly at her. "I would die for you, Miss Constance," she murmured.

"And thee't be obedient for my sake, too, Fanny, girl, wilt thee not?" observed Stephen, in an affectionate tone.

She looked up at him lovingly.

"Indeed I will, dear Stephen," she replied,

And so, without more words, she was removed to her sleeping-apartment, and Floret took her leave of her, while Susan, whom Fanny, after a careful study of her features, recognized, much to her delight, prepared to wait upon her—as, in fact, she had waited on her—as if she was a sister, whom she loved better than herself.

As soon as they were alone, Fanny put her arms round Susan's neck, and said, with a kind of frightened look:

"I begin to see that something terrible and strange has occurred. Stephen looks older, and you look older to me than you ought, and yet Miss Constance is as young and beautiful as she was when—when—"

"Dear, dear Fanny, you must not talk nor think now," interposed Susan, placing her hand before Fanny's mouth. "You have been ill for a long time; many changes have occurred since, and the happiness of many depends upon your recovery; therefore, you must be quiet and patient, obedient and good, and the Doctor says you will soon be quite well. O Fanny, do what the Doctor wishes you. We all love you, and we shall all be so, so happy when we know that you are well and strong again."



Fanny's kind and yielding nature was in her favor; for, laying her head back upon her pillow, she murmured:

"I will try to be patient and resigned. I shall know all, I fear, soon enough."

The Doctor hurried home, and sent a gentle opiate, which Susan instantly administered to Fanny, and she quickly sank into a gentle but sound slumber.

Floret, in the meantime, took her departure, escorted by Bob, in a yet prouder and more dignified style than any lord mayor could have brought to light. His eye glittered like the evening star, his face was all smiles, and his heart leaped with joy—for had not Fanny recovered her senses?—would not the Poor Girl become a great lady?—and had he not, after several shyness on the part of Em'ly, *prae-tised*, with success, "the double-harness fold"?

Bob parted with Floret at Mrs. Spencer's door, and she found, on entering the house, that Mrs. Spencer and Ida had gone out for a short time, taking with them the little Indian girl.

She was not sorry to hear this from the diminutive little maid whom Mrs. Spencer employed to assist her, because she felt a strong wish to be alone, that she might collect her thoughts, and contemplate calmly, but with a just and keen perception, the new situation which the discovery of Fanny Shelley's existence and the restoration of her senses opened for her. She, therefore, proceeded to her humble, but neatly-arranged apartments, and, retiring to her bed-chamber, removed her walking apparel, and returned to the sitting-room, repeating, involuntarily, in consequence, perhaps, of her lightened spirits, the two lines which *he* had sung in response to her in Trentham Wood:

"La, la, la, sol fa mi,  
My lady looked through the orange tree."

While the last note was lingering upon her lip, she fancied that she saw a figure arise from a chair which was placed in a corner of the room.

She turned quickly, thinking it was Ida who had returned, and was anxiously awaiting the result of her visit to Mrs. Henry Vere, and she gazed, as she supposed, toward her with a smile, which instantly faded from her face.

It was Lord Victor who stood before her.

With a disconcerted mien, she retreated a few steps, and he advanced a little more hastily, fearing she was about to retire from the room.

"Will you not speak to me?" he said, in low and earnest tones.

She cast her eyes upon the ground, and remained silent.

He looked steadfastly upon her face, and continued:

"Indeed, you may, Floret, without consideration or hesitation. Observe my attire. You will perceive that I am in deep mourning. I have suffered a heavy family bereavement. A fit of apoplexy carried off my fa-

ther some ten days back, and on the morning following that day, the post brought a letter, conveying the mournful intelligence that my elder and only brother was drowned while attempting to rival Leander's feat, and swim across the Hellespont. I am, therefore, now the Marquis of Broadlands."

Floret placed her hand on her bosom, to keep down the tumultuous beating of her heart; but, save by a slight bend of the form, to acknowledge that she heard what he said, she remained silent and motionless.

"I have not mentioned this change in my position, Floret," he continued, in the same low, rich, fervid tone, "with any other object than to acquaint you that I am responsible to no one on earth but myself for my actions, so that you may the more fully comprehend what I am about to say to you. May I pray you to be seated while I address you?"

"Thank you, my Lord," returned Floret, faintly; "I would rather remain as I am."

"Be it so," he replied.

He paused for a moment, as if to take a deep breath, and to nerve himself to utter all that he had in his mind and that he intended to say, and then he went on—his voice, though trembling slightly, being very earnest in its expression.

"Let me premise that I am fully acquainted with your history so far as it can be at present known, but that it has not, does not, and will not affect my intentions. I should say to you what I am now about to reveal with the same sincerity, if I knew you to be a veritable Poor Girl, the daughter of that strange old gipsy man who had you under his care, and with more sincerity than if I knew you to be the only child of one of our proudest dukes.

"Floret, human emotions are not regulated by the relations in which we stand to each other in society, although society endeavors to make feeling subservient to rank, and they are not regulated by them, because they will not submit to their thralldom. Love is not a deity—"

Floret raised her eyes, and interposed, in a tone of distress: "I pray you, my Lord, to spare me further remarks."

"Floret," he replied, quickly, "you are too keenly sensitive. I can easily comprehend how, with your natural feelings and instincts, your hard attrition with the world has made you suffer more acutely and poignantly the remarks and conduct of others than it would those who have been more happily circumstanced; but, pardon me, it scarcely allows you to be unjust to me in your thoughts."

"Unjust to you, my Lord!" she exclaimed, taken off her guard by her surprise. "You wrong me by that impression. I have never been unjust to you in my thoughts. On the contrary, I have always regarded you with the ten—with the kin—with, I wish to say, proper appreciation of your worth," she finished, blushing like a rose, and much confused.

His heart beat rapidly as he observed her embarrassment, and he went on quickly:



"I so wish that we should quite understand each other, Floret, that I entreat you, if I use an observation that may be unacceptable to you, to correct me. I have not sought you believe me, to extort from you any expression of sentiments or opinion. I am here to make a plain statement to you, and to leave to you your own time to give me a reply, if you vouchsafe me any reply at all."

Again he paused, and drew a deep breath. He then proceeded rapidly:

"Floret, when we first met I was a mere boy, and you were a child. I was greatly attracted by your face, and much struck, not only by the fact of your making to me the offer of a bouquet of wild flowers of your own arrangement, but by your manner and by your words. I smiled at your offering, and you, with a swift and rising color, as though that smile had stung you, begged me not to scorn your gift. You told me that it was all you had to bestow—you had nothing better, or you would give it to me. Floret, after that event, your face was engraven upon my eyes, your words upon my heart. Surrounded as I had been with sycophants and flatterers, I had seldom met with a piece of genuine, unsophisticated nature, unless it were of a very unattractive kind. Your eyes, clear, large, and liquid, haunted me; your words thrilled me as I repeated them over and over again. I was but a boy—a boy, Floret—one who is spoken of with contempt where the heart is concerned; but who is, nevertheless, then sincere, guileless, pure, and unselfish. I confess that I regarded the event as an episode in my life, out of which nothing would come but a pleasant memory, and that time would wear off its influence. But time did not diminish its influence, and memory only seemed to grow brighter by feeding on the incidents of that morning. I promised that I would preserve that small bouquet while I lived. I have it now. Will you not believe me?"

"I—I know it," she faltered, faintly.

She remembered vividly Mrs. Spencer's little anecdote.

He smiled instantly, and rejoined:

"Very likely. Poor Mrs. Spencer's zeal very nearly robbed me of my greatest treasure. Let me proceed; I was very careful after that circumstance of your gift, and it became my daily companion, as it is now. When I went to college, I found that the society of friends and companions, the laborious duties of study, and the indulgence of pleasure did not weaken the brightness of the vision which nightly brought your face before me, or diminish my daily recollection of our meeting in Trentham Wood. As I grew, these memories grew with me, until it became eventually a subject of such grave importance to me that it was essential that I should examine into the real feelings of my heart. The way in which your form and face clung to my memory was neither an accident nor a thing of course, and I felt it a duty to myself to solve the mystery. At this time I met you a second time, also in

Trentham Wood, when, strangely enough, a second time my services were requisite to give you aid, although I then failed to succeed in rescuing you. That interview, however, served to make still brighter in my mind the impression of you that I had already formed, and to confirm an opinion which I had hazarded as to your nature; but still I was at a loss to comprehend why your face, your eyes, your form, your voice should haunt me incessantly; but when I quitted this house after the first interview that I had here with you, the mystery remained a mystery no longer. Floret, that night my self-examination proved to me that I loved you."

Floret turned half way from him. O, the bliss; O, the ecstasy, the unfathomable joy, those four poor words gave to her; and O, the agony which instantly succeeded! for what could his affection for her be but a love misplaced—a love which she could not accept, and which it would break her heart to reject!

In a somewhat unsteady, but still a passionately earnest voice, he proceeded:

"That I loved you truly, fondly, devotedly, and sincerely. Loved you, Floret, as a man should love a woman, as woman loves when she does love—without a reserve."

He ceased for a moment, evidently overcome by his emotion, but hastily, by a strong effort, recovering himself, he went on:

"When assured that I was not self-deluded, I then addressed myself to the consideration of the course it was my duty to pursue. My task was an easy one; but my decision was not arrived at without a most careful reflection and close search into the deepest recesses of my nature. The result was the same as if I had not reflected at all. I found that I loved you truthfully, and I determined that, if I could win your consent, we would join our fates together, and whatever would be our circumstances, we would pass through life together, loving and loved. On arriving at this conclusion, I sought you to acquaint you with my self-communion and its end; but you had quitted here on a visit to Lady Brackleigh. I sought you there; but although I had the happiness to see you on that occasion for a moment only, dressed to receive the Earl of Brackleigh, I was unable to speak with you. I sought you again, but you were gone, and none knew where. I have since searched for you in every direction throughout London where I thought it probable or possible you might be found, but in vain. This morning I learned, to my joy, that you had returned to your home, and I am here—here, Floret, untrammelled by a consideration, with the power to act as I will, unfettered; here with a full heart, in which there lurks not a scruple, with a full knowledge of your condition and my own, to entreat me to grant me your hand, that you may become my beloved, adored, honored wife."

He spoke with so much earnestness and emotion that the last word was barely audible, and he became silent.



He saw her press her folded hands upon her bosom, he saw the fast-falling tears descend from her eyes, but her head was bent down, perhaps to conceal her agitation.

He squeezed his hands together, and in a husky voice he said;

"Perhaps you have already given your heart to another, and my confession only pains and distresses you?"

"No!—O, no—no!" she replied, faintly, but without raising her head.

"Floret—dear, dear Floret, have I offended you?" he continued, earnestly.

She raised her eyes to his, and, suffused as they were with bright tears, he saw that there was in them an expression of reproach.

"May I hope?" he gasped, eagerly. "O Floret, one word—one little word—for my heart is bursting!"

Not a word. But she looked in his eyes, her own beaming with such fond, passionate love, that instinctively he held out his arms to her, and with a cry of entranced delight, she flung herself into them.

A haven of hope, of joy, of rest, of happiness, to her!"

It was awkward that at this moment the Countess of Brackleigh should open the door, and observe the poor, tempest-tossed vessel taking refuge in the said haven.

#### CHAPTER XL.

"What is the world to them,

Its pomp, its pleasure, and its nonsense all,  
Who in each other clasp whatever fair  
High fancy forms and lavish hearts can wish?  
Something than beauty dearer should they look  
Or on the mind, or mind illumin'd face;  
Truth, goodness, honor, harmony, and love,  
The richest bounty of indulgent Heaven!"

—THOMSON.

Of course, the situation was exceedingly embarrassing both to Floret and to Victor Marquis of Broadlands, when simultaneously they perceived the Countess of Brackleigh standing at the door of the apartment.

The young Marquis, however, looked, and no doubt he felt greatly elated—not at the discovery, but at the delicious fact in which he had been, as he regarded it, prematurely caught.

Floret, on the contrary, was overwhelmed with very genuine confusion, for when impelled by the impulses of a long, deeply-cherished love, and of joy to find it so ardently and truthfully reciprocated, she threw herself into the opened arms of Victor, he

"Did much what you would do,

His young lips thanked her with a grateful kiss"—not a very long one, for the unexpected entrance of the Countess interfered with its duration, and prevented what might have proved a very exquisite intercommunion of thoughts and acknowledgments.

Poor Floret! Within her recollection the lips of a male had never been pressed to hers. Daddy Windy, during her childhood, when at times fuller than usual of gin and water and tobacco, would feel parental emotions of affection steal over him. Regarding her sweet

face with an approving eye, he would condescend to proffer her a chaste salute; but she invariably shrank from him with loathing and haughty indignation. Lifer Leper had at all times approached her with a singular respect, and he had never permitted a forward boy, who gazed with longing eye upon her peachy cheek, with designs upon its bloom, to come near her.

So, when Victor drew her fondly to his breast and imprinted the aforesaid "grateful kiss", a new sensation stole over her, sweet, delicious— indescribable.

Ay—indescribable! For who shall be able to put into words the emotions which, on receiving the first kiss of pure and passionate love darting down

"Down to the heart through lips and breath,"

is felt by a young and innocent girl? We are sure that we are quite unable to depict in any language that which has no voice; and we are equally sure that no one else knows anything about the matter, so as to aptly describe it, but the one who has

"Loved and suffered."

Even she would not attempt the task, although she remembers the sensation so well—ah, so well!

Floret, outwardly, was bewildered, trembling, confused, and her cheek wore the color of an expanded moss rose. She looked frightened, too, and displayed evident signs of running from the room, but that Lord Victor—we shall continue to call him by that title—interfered to prevent her.

But what did the Countess of Brackleigh say? How did she look? What did she do?

To their utter surprise, and to the restoration of their faculties, she burst into a wild and passionate fit of weeping.

They both regarded her in astonished silence, until Floret, perceiving how convulsed was her frame, approached her, and timidly taking her hand, begged her to explain the cause of her tears.

Abashed and frightened at her own instinctive acknowledgment of the love she bore for Victor, she was afraid that she had committed a fault so dreadful, that it had brought this flood of tears to the eyes of the Countess. She did not herself think the fault, if fault it were, so very dreadful; but she was prepared to ask pardon for it, and promise not to be guilty of the weakness—not wickedness, she would not admit that—any more, if she could help it.

She did not proceed so far as to say this, although she thought it; for the Countess quickly dried her tears, and, holding out a hand to each, said, as she pressed theirs:

"Pardon my weakness; the sight of your happiness caused me to imagine what mine might have been, and to remember what it has been!"

She sighed deeply, and then resumed:

"Victor, you are a noble fellow, and worthy of the most devoted and unalloyed love of the fairest and truest woman in the world. May



she, in her future integrity prove, what her young life has already foreshadowed, as spotless as she is fair. You must remember that I am the daughter of one of the people, and I appreciate your honorable abandonment of every consideration but that of having an innocent and true woman as the partner of your happiness, and the depository of your love. I congratulate you both."

She kissed Floret tenderly on both cheeks, and with a smile, and in a soft, enthusiastic tone, which made Floret's heart leap, she said:

"And the Poor Girl will be a Great Lady yet."

The Countess then acknowledged to them that she had reached the door of the apartment as Lord Victor made his declaration to Floret, and as she was anxious to hear what he would say, she paused there. If his proposals had been of such a nature that Floret ought to have spurned them, it was her intention to have interfered, and to have sternly rebuked him for his wickedness; but when she ascertained that his purpose was an honorable one, she remained quiet until that eloquent embrace took place, and then she "discovered check".

She then questioned Floret closely respecting the causes which led her to quit her roof so abruptly, and begged her to communicate to her all that had occurred to her since they had been separated.

Floret complied without reserve, because she believed the affection which the Countess professed for her to be genuine, and her interest in her successful future disinterested; for if she succeeded, it was clear the Countess must prove a heavy sufferer.

The Countess was not a little amazed to find Floret in possession of the stolen register of the marriage between the Earl of Brackleigh and the Marchioness of Westchester; but she was yet more astounded to learn that Fanny Shelley was living. An expression of triumphant joy passed over her flushed features, and an exclamation of such intense gratification escaped her lips, that it attracted the notice both of Floret and Lord Victor. They exchanged looks.

Presently, taking advantage of a pause in the conversation, Floret said, hesitatingly:

"Pardon me, Lady Brackleigh, if I make the suggestion that your efforts to prove the marriage of—of—my—of Miss Constance Plantagenet with Lennox Bertram, and the establishment of my claim to be the legitimate offspring of that marriage, tends to a species of self immolation."

"And if it does, what then?" inquired the Countess, sternly.

"I would ask humbly," she returned—"for I feel as though I were in some way a participator in the wrong done to you—wherefore you are desirous of throwing away your position, and of giving to the world the power of saying many cruel and unkind things of you?"

"Not cruel and unkind things of me," interposed the Countess, hastily; "the world will compassionate—will pity me."

"I would rather perish in miserable obscurity than be pitied!" exclaimed Floret, with a sudden gesture of lofty scorn. And then she added, in a quieter tone, "You would cease to be Lady Brackleigh were the clandestine marriage to be substantiated, would you not? You would return to your father's home broken-spirited, humiliated, and unhappy?"

Not more broken-spirited, humiliated, or miserable than I am now."

"But it would be so?" persisted Floret.

"It would," returned the Countess.

"Then do not sacrifice your rank and fame for me, I implore you," she urged, with an earnest anxiety, that could not be misinterpreted.

The Countess regarded her steadfastly.

"You are a strange girl, Floret," she exclaimed. "Up to the present moment, you have evinced the most passionate desire to be acknowledged as the lawful daughter of the Marchioness and the Earl, and now you entreat me not to take the steps which are necessary to accomplish that wish."

"Understand me, Lady Brackleigh," observed Floret, in reply. "I am most anxious—I have no words to describe how anxious I am—to be acknowledged by those who are my parents. But now that I can comprehend in what position that acknowledgment would not only place the innocent but the guilty, I shrink from requiring more from the Marchioness of Westchester than an admission, made to me personally and in private, that she is the Constance Neville named in the register which I have in my possession, that the Lennox Bertram there mentioned is now Earl of Brackleigh, and that I am their child."

"Would you be content now, Floret, after what has passed a few minutes back between yourself and Lord Victor, to let the world believe you to be a creature without a pedigree," asked the Countess, sharply.

Floret reddened deeply.

"I am deeply grateful to the Marquis of Broadlands for the honor he has proposed to confer upon me," she returned, in a low voice; "but he has generously permitted me to choose my own time for a reply to that proposition, and I think it would be both ungracious and unjust to him, if I were for an instant to withhold the expression of my determination to be governed by the result of a last appeal to the Marchioness."

"What if it should succeed?" suggested the Countess, rapidly.

"I should force myself to be content with any arrangement she might propose," she replied.

"What are your suppositions respecting that arrangement?" inquired the Countess. "You have, no doubt, already considered the form it would take."



"I have," returned Floret, with some embarrassment. "I believe that it is out of the power of the Marchioness to openly and publicly acknowledge me without destroying herself, greatly injuring the Earl, and ruining your ladyship's present position; while my own position, were I to enter society, would be most trying and painful to me. I should be the target for every eye; the butt for every sneering, scornful, insulting gibe or compassionate taunt. A public acknowledgment would thus only injure those whom I would not for the world harm, while it would win no credit for myself. I know that justice should be inexorable, that sinfulness should be openly exposed and publicly punished; but I am human, and I cannot arm the law to strike down from their places in society those whom the ties of Nature, the mere instincts of humanity, teach me to look up to with filial tenderness, and to preserve from danger whenever the power to do so is intrusted to me."

"What," again interposed the Countess, "can you think, and feel, and would you act thus, after the cruel sufferings you have endured, and the terrible temptations to which you have been exposed by the very person who should have nurtured you and cherished you as the rarest, dearest, and most delicate gift which Heaven had presented to her?"

"O Lady Brackleigh," replied Floret, compressing her hands, "if she but looks upon me tenderly, speaks to me gently, and owns that I am her own beloved child, although she dare not acknowledge so much to the world, I can wittingly—nay, with joy, forgive all the miseries I have experienced through being discarded by her. Besides, Lady Brackleigh, the law of retaliation is, you know, not a law based upon reason or justice. The fact that my parent has from my infancy disowned me, gives me no right to attempt to effect her destruction."

"Floret!" again interrupted the Countess, impatiently, and somewhat angrily, "you are reasoning childishly. What, indeed, should you know of the demands of society, or what the laws of social morality exact? How can you attempt to reason for Lady Westchester, or think for me? Do you imagine that your gentle tenderness, your susceptible sympathies, or the generous tendencies of your forgiving nature, can arrest the progress of the great machine of retribution, which is rolling on to its destination? You have passed through a life—a young life it is true—surrounded by pitfalls, snares, and evils of a kind too horrible to think of calmly, without sin, with purity of feeling, and integrity of purpose; but to the pure all things are pure, and though you have witnessed some of the worst phases of life, and have undergone some of its hardest teachings, you have yet much to learn. You are but old enough as yet to reason by feeling—I do so by experience. You must leave to me, as one of the individuals most deeply affected by your acknowledgment, the control of the plans by which your

birth and parentage shall be made known, in a manner which shall not leave to the invidious a single sneer. You exhibit far more filial tenderness than your unnatural mother could possibly hope to expect from you, and for which she entertains neither sympathy nor respect. I entertain both, and although I confess to have been at first animated by the most vindictive feelings against the Marchioness of Westchester, and stimulated by feelings of revenge to drag her down from the false elevation upon which she so unjustly stands, I shall henceforward, in consideration of your feelings, your interests, and your future position in life, act in such a manner as to shield you from contumelious opinions, while I firmly establish your rights.

Floret, although she felt a strong disinclination to surrender to Lady Brackleigh the entire management of her case, perceived that she had no real ground for offering any opposition to her claim to its control; but she inwardly resolved to interfere if she saw that the Countess, in spite of what she had advanced, really sought the social destruction of her mother.

The Countess then, with a calmness which was perhaps the result of a full knowledge of the wrongs she had suffered, and the position in which she stood, reviewed all the circumstances connected with the first connection between the Marchioness and Bertram, the subsequent second marriages of the pair, and the evidence existing upon it, and arrived still at the same conclusion as before, that the link which would complete the full chain of evidence to establish the birth of Floret was Fanny Shelley.

It was necessary that she should remember all that had transpired while she was living with Constance Plantagenet, prior to the clandestine marriage, and subsequent to it, even up to the moment of quitting her with the child.

The Countess expressed a very strong wish to see and examine Fanny; but Floret suggested that it would be better for herself to visit her constantly during the recovery of her strength, so that, as she grew accustomed to the sight of her, she might be able gradually to lead her into the knowledge of who she really was—that she was the child of her foster-sister, and not the foster-sister herself.

The Countess acknowledged the prudence of this suggestion, and declared her readiness to conform to it; but she endeavored at the same time to extort from Floret a promise to take up her abode with her at Brackleigh Mansion, not only until she was acknowledged as the daughter of the Earl, but until she became a marchioness herself.

Floret objected, with blushing cheeks, but scarcely with the vehemence with which Lord Victor opposed the arrangement, and he successfully argued the Countess out of the proposition, although he consented to an arrangement that Floret should visit her occasionally, at periods when he and his cousin, Lady



Adeln, should  $\text{\pounds}$  present. The Countess then declared that she would be purse-bearer to Floret, and insisted that she should supply her with the means of living until she became possessed by her indisputable right to property of her own.

This proffer, however, Floret gently, but firmly refused.

"I must be independent of all the world," she exclaimed. "I have the skill to labor, and the strength, and will do it, and I will support myself by the labor of my hands until I secure that income which, as your ladyship asserts, will be mine by right."

"Floret, this cannot be," exclaimed Lord Victor, gravely. "There is now no doubt of your origin, and your right is as clear, though not yet established, as it will ever be. As the daughter of an earl, it will not become you to work like—"

"Stay, my lord!" interrupted Floret, with a flush upon her cheek, a glitter in her eye, and a sudden assumption of a proud and dignified manner. "Independence of spirit and integrity of purpose command an elevation of position which no mere personal title can give. The poorest work-girl breathing, who parts with a modicum of her life every one of those long, long days and weary nights in which she works, may claim to be prouder of her position than any pensioner who subsists upon bounty, to which she fancies she is entitled because she is by birth a gentlewoman. I speak not of the helpless, but of the indolent. The bread won by individual exertion is sweet, because a full equivalent has been given for it—alas! how very much more is constantly exacted! but that which is doled out to the dependent can only be swallowed with a sense of meanness and humility, from the visitings of which I hope ever to be spared. Lord Victor, there is nothing shameful—nay, there is nothing nobler than honest labor. If it should please Heaven to place me in the position to which my birth entitles me, I shall never feel so proud of it as I did when I received the first payment for labor done beneath this roof, or for the few shillings which were paid to me, after toiling from dawn until long past midnight, in my recent squalid home. Your task, my Lord, is an easy one; if you object to hold communion with one whose greatest demerit is that she is poor, you can satisfy your inclination by mixing only in a wealthier and more congenial society. I am too proud to be dependent—I am far too proud to receive help when I can help myself, and, beyond this, I am too proud of what I have done, ever to look back upon the period when I was an embroiderer, or a poor artificial florist, with any other emotion than self-gratulation; and, let me add, I shall never hold any feeling in common with those who nourish for me a sense of humiliation at the recollection that I was once—a work-girl."

Floret spoke with much animation and warmth; Lord Victor evidently felt stung by her remarks, and he said, hastily:

"Floret, forgive me. You are right—I was wrong. I was anxious to save you from a toil which is unnecessary; but as a matter of feeling it is better that you should preserve your independence. I am quite aware that you could not properly accept pecuniary assistance from me, and Lady Brackleigh will comprehend with a proper spirit, I am sure, why you decline it from her. We will, therefore, pass over that subject, and proceed to some pleasanter topic."

But at this moment Ida entered the room, full of healthful spirits, which she endeavored, with a very weak result, to keep under control. She said that, while out with Mrs. Spencer on business, they had, by the strangest accident, met with the Honorable Hyde Vaughan, who had no sooner heard that Floret had returned home, than he expressed his great satisfaction at the circumstance, especially as he said that he had some questions of the very greatest importance to put to her.

"But," continued Ida, rattling on without thought, "when I asked him what they were, and whether I should put them to you for him, he said, No; that he could only ask them of you himself, and so he said he would return here with us, but Mrs. Spencer told him we were going shopping, and he said he would go shopping, too; and so he did, and—and as—he declared that the conversation of a child was only at times interesting, and that the remarks of elderly ladies were, if edifying, not without a suspicion of prolixity, he suggested that Mrs. Spencer and little Meals should walk together, because the ideas of childhood and old age approach each other, and that he and I—"

She paused abruptly, not alone because she perceived a curious smile upon Floret's face, but because Lord Victor's laugh was audible.

Neck and face became instantly crimson, and she looked hastily from one to the other, as if she were conscious that she had committed some fault, although she did not exactly know what it was.

"Why do you pause?" inquired Floret, a little archly.

"I don't know," responded Ida, still gazing inquiringly at Lord Victor.

"You were about to say that Vaughan suggested that he should walk with you because your ideas would approach each other."

"Ye—es," replied Ida, with confusion. "But," she added, hastily, "Mr. Vaughan is below: I will request him to come up."

Before any objection could be tendered, she flew out of the room, more to hide her burning cheeks than to fulfill the mission she had undertaken, for she intrusted it to Mrs. Spencer, and retreated to that good lady's bed-chamber.

Hyde Vaughan entered the room immediately after Mrs. Spencer had communicated with him; and, while offering his congratulations to Floret, he cast his eyes about to see where Ida had placed herself, but she was not visible, and a question respecting her elicited



from Victor the information—that she had quitted the room in search of him.

“A very remarkable circumstance has occurred,” said Hyde Vaughan, as closing the room door, he placed his back against it; “and it has immediate reference to Miss Ida. She always refuses me her surname,” he added, parenthetically, looking fixedly at Floret. “Perhaps, Miss Floret, you will supply it to me?”

Floret felt the color rise in her cheeks, for at the moment she was in the same condition.

“I cannot,” she said, faintly.

“But you were at school together?” he suggested.

“Yes; for three years,” responded Floret; “but the young ladies there were only known by their Christian names.”

“No other?” he inquired.

“By no other,” she answered.

“How very odd!” he remarked. Then he added, hastily, as he observed Floret’s heightened color: “Perhaps, however, that fact may tend to confirm an impression that I have formed, and which may have great as well as singular results. Having taken a—a—considerable—a great—a—personal interest in Miss Ida— ‘Pshaw! do not grin at me, Victor, in that self-satisfied fashion, you will put me out,’ he added, a little pettishly, as he observed Lord Victor smile. “I—I say—I—where was I—O!—circumstances of a very remarkable character having introduced me to you and to Miss Ida, and events equally strange having parted and rejoined us, I confess I have felt a deep interest in the future prospects of you both—”

“Especially of Miss Ida,” suggested Lord Victor, pointedly.

“Very well—yes,” rejoined Hyde Vaughan.

“But, hang it, Victor, don’t jest on this subject, for it is very serious, I assure you. Well, I have been lately thrown—well, Victor, have thrown myself lately much in the way of Miss Ida, if you like that better.”

“It was so much nearer the truth,” quietly remarked Lord Victor.

“Very well,” continued Vaughan, “and having thrown myself in the way of Miss Ida, many conversations have ensued between us, during one of which she informed me that she was placed at a school, bearing the curious title of Ugglebarnby House, at Ugglebarnby, in Yorkshire. Now it so happened that, as I felt personally interested in the future of Miss Ida, I considered it my duty to interest my mother and sister in it also. I gave them a brief sketch of her history, and named the place in which she had been reared and educated. Since that revelation a very remarkable event has happened which I cannot at present reveal, but which you shall all be made acquainted with, if success should attend certain inquiries I have undertaken to make, both of you, Miss Floret, and of others. Will you tell me whether Miss Ida was at Ugglebarnby House when you were placed

there?”

“She was,” answered Floret.

“And had been there long?” he inquired.

“From her childhood, I believe,” he replied.

“She did not quit the house to visit any relatives or friends while you were there, did she?”

“O, no,” replied Floret, promptly.

“You are quite sure of this?” pursued Vaughan.

“Quite sure,” returned Floret.

“What was the name of the person who kept the school?” he asked.

“Blixenfinik,” replied Floret; “they were sisters—the Misses Ate and Sycorax Blixenfinik.”

Hyde Vaughan referred to a card.

“That is the name,” he said, and added:

“And Ida quitted that place with you some few months since?”

“She did. We were on our way to London, when you, Sir, in company with Lord Victor, made an effort to rescue us,” was the reply.

“It must be the same,” he mused. Then he continued: “Do you know anything more of her history than what is comprised in the simple fact of your having been at school together?”

“I do not,” replied Floret.

“Did the Misses Blixenfinik at any time, in speaking of her to you, by any chance mention any of her relatives or friends?” he interrogated.

“Never,” replied Floret. “It was not their custom to name, under any circumstances, any matter which had reference to the private relations of any of us. It was deemed enough for us that we were thrown together, and had each a name to distinguish us from the herd. As I, too, am personally interested in the future of Ida,” she added, gravely, “I regard myself as her sincere, perhaps her only friend. May I inquire your object in putting these questions to me?”

“You certainly are not Ida’s only friend, Miss Floret,” exclaimed Hyde Vaughan, a little briskly; “and what’s more, not only her sincere friend. However, you are her dear—that is, one of her dearest friends—and you are certainly entitled to put that question to me. Facts are stranger than fiction, and curiously, as I have been introduced to Ida, it is yet more curious that I should be the means of discovering her parentage.”

“Indeed!” cried Floret and Victor together.

“That is,” he subjoined, checking himself,

“I fully expect that I shall be. I may mention that my mother has a relative, who for many years has been the inmate of a lunatic asylum, where she was barbarously placed by an officer in the Army, who had married her secretly and afterward deserted her. His cruelty and desertion deprived her of her reason, and it could never be ascertained whom she had married, nor where she had placed her



child, of whom she constantly raved. About three years since, she had a lucid interval of about a month, but was then so depressed and pensive she would scarcely speak a word. She, however, one day, asked for a sum of money, which she placed in a parcel, and went out with it alone. As she was then quite sensible, no one, at her request, accompanied her; and when she returned, she fell into such a series of fits of weeping, increasing in hysterical violence, that her malady unhappily returned, and she was again placed under the charge of able attendants in a private asylum. After she was conveyed away, a letter arrived for her from Uggelbarnby, Yorkshire. It was opened; it proved to be a receipt for the identical sum for which she had asked, which was given to her, and of which it was known she had disposed. It was an advance for the board and education of Miss Ida, and it was signed, 'A. and S. Blixenfiuk.'

"It could have been for no other Ida!" exclaimed Floret, quickly; "she was the only young lady who bore that Christian name at the school, and I well remember the arrival of the remittance of which you speak; for in the interval between the expiration of the sum previously paid, and that which was received soon after I was placed there, she was very nearly starved to death."

A shudder passed through the frames of those present — save Floret's. She smiled faintly, and added:

"Indeed, it was only long practice in abstinence from food which sustained her. Just before we made our escape together, I believe that both of us could have gone without food without any unusual inconvenience for two, or even three days. Lengthened intervals, and infinitesimal doses of provision, gave to us the power of enduring very long fasts."

Lord Victor and Hyde Vaughan simultaneously grated their teeth together, and the latter vowed that he would not rest until he had broken up the accursed school for living skeletons.

"I was sure," he resumed, "that I should obtain the most certain clue from you; and the next thing will be to trace out the rascally husband who has behaved so ill in this affair. My mother has recently engaged the services of the greatest authority in mental disorders, and he gives her every reason to believe that her cousin will recover her senses at no very distant period, and that the recovery will be permanent. This will be a fortunate event, because recently a very handsome property has accrued to her from an uncle on her father's side, and that it will enable her to live not only in very good style, but it will enable her to bring to book, if he is worth the trouble and the money, the scoundrel who behaved so ill to her. I think it advisable, at present, not to communicate to Ida what I have revealed to you, until we have determined, beyond a doubt, her maternal parentage. I do not suppose that time will be far off; but, in the meantime, I am anxious to introduce her to my mother and

sister, if she will consent to accompany me home. Perhaps in the interview which will ensue, something may be elicited from her which will clear up any doubt that may remain. You ladies manage these little delicate inquiries so much better than we men, that you may possibly bring to a happy conclusion that which I should, perhaps, spoil."

"I am afraid that Ida, unless she has some inkling of the real object of the visit you wish her to pay, will be too timid to comply with your request," suggested Floret. "But I hear her footstep on the stair. You can make the proposal to her when she comes in."

"No—no," Miss Floret, I beg of you," cried Vaughan, with a singular embarrassment, "do not leave it to me. I shall only make a stupid mess of it. You know what I wish her to do, and you know best how to propose it. You will accompany her, I hope."

Before Floret could reply, Ida entered the room. Somehow her eyes caught those of Hyde Vaughan, and she blushed immediately. She turned hastily to Floret, and affecting a laugh, she said:

"Floret, there is a person below who wishes to see you on the most particular business, as everybody in the world seemingly does."

"To see me?" ejaculated Floret, with surprise.

Lord Victor looked on anxiously.

"Yes," returned Ida. "Do you remember, upon an occasion, a groom interfered to prevent an awfully dirty-looking man behaving rude to me?"

Floret remembered the incident in the coffee-shop, and replied readily in the affirmative.

"He says," continued Ida, "that his name is Nathaniel Ferret, and he must see you; but he won't detain you a minute."

"Nathaniel Ferret," repeated the Countess, quickly; "a groom?"

She turned to Victor and Hyde Vaughan, and said, hurriedly:

"Oblige me by descending to some room until this man is gone. Do not let him see you. I believe that I know the object of his visit. Not a word, Victor, but go!"

Both the friends, with evident reluctance, quitted the room; and as soon as their backs turned, the Countess said, hastily, to Ida:

"Tell the fellow to come up here, but not a word about my being here when you usher him into this room. You can join Lord Victor and Vaughan, wherever they may be, until the man has departed."

Ida did not quite approve of this brusque order, but as she had no conception of the position in life to which she was actually entitled, with as good a grace as she could muster, and a cheerful smile on her beautiful face, she descended to Mr. Nathaniel Ferret.

In the meantime, the Countess glided into Floret's bed-chamber, in order that she might hear every word that fell from Nat's lips; and she had hardly closed the door to upon her-



self, when with a sly, slow, luring gait, Nat entered the room, and made a kind of half-bow, half-scrape, and touched his hair upon his temple to Floret.

## CHAPTER XLI.

"Dreadful post

Of observation! darker every hour."

—YOUNG.

As Nat made his bow to Floret he started with evident surprise, and, although it was not in accordance with the rules of etiquette, a low whistle escaped him.

He, however, recovered himself instantly, and once again touched his temple with his forefinger.

"I axes pardon, Miss," he said, in a very subdued voice, and his most respectful smile, "but it ain't just possible to look at you, and not see that you're the werry spit o' the lady as I've come to say a vord or two to you about. You remember me, Miss, don't you?"

"I think I have seen you before," returned Floret, with some slight hesitation. "It was at a—"

"Corfee crib, Miss, ag'in the ra'alvay tramenus. I was the parvy who showed a ginger-tufted moocher how to take 'is breakfast on a pavement, as a reyard for wexing an' discouragin' a young lady-friend o' yourn. I'm the party, Miss, as gav'd you a card v'ereon was written, Natanel Ferret 'orse an' groom, old Bond street. I'm Natanel Ferret!"

"I remember the circumstances very clearly," said Floret, "but—"

"I axed you to write to me, but you havn't, so I've cum'd to you, acos time's gettin' on," he continued. "I've seen quite enough service. My pimple's a sheddin' its coat, an' 'll soon become like a bladder o' lard. A public-house as I've 'ad my hi on for a werry long per'od 'll soon be in the market, an' savin' your presence, a little fair an' putty filly, as is agoin' to run in double harness with me—a werry well matched pair ve shall make, I 'spec's—is werry anxious to make start on it—"

"You must excuse me," said Floret, with an inquiring and bewildered look at him. "But I do not quite understand what I can possibly have to do with your arrangements."

"Ah! but I beg your pardon, Miss; you have werry much to do with my arrangements," he returned. "The public house and the fair party can't be 'ad by your werry respectf'ul an' 'umble servant to command Natanel Ferret, unless you perwides the means."

"The means!" repeated Floret, with astonishment.

"Yes, Miss, vich, translated into English, means the brads," rejoined Nat, "or, wulgarily speaking, the money."

"The money," echoed Floret, more bewildered than ever; "I have no money; and if I

had, I do not see what claim you have upon it."

"Yes, I 'ave, Miss, as I will quickly show you," returned Nat, with a knowing nod and a confident wink of the eye. He saw, however, that she regarded him with a haughty mien, which, having often seen in people of high birth, he pretty well comprehended—he therefore added: "I wishes to be werry 'speckful to you, Miss, and if I should get a foot over the traces, pull me up short Miss, if you please."

She made him no reply, but turned her head away as if in disgust.

He observed the movement, and he quickly brought her head round again by half-a-dozen words.

"Ven I was a lad, I wur groom to the Wicount Bertram," he said.

She turned her face instantly toward him. He gave a significant smile, and proceeded:

"The Wicount was a werry 'ansome gentlemen, an' he was thought a good deal on by the ladies, but more 'specially by a Miss Plantagenet, whose werry pieter you are as she was then. Vell, Miss, von night I was in the Wicount's apartment a writin' a letter to my dear old mother, poor soul!—ah, she's gone, Miss! a havelanch slided off a dust-heap von morning as she was werry busy below it a vorkin' industriously for her daily bread, an' smothered her—but that ain't nothen to you, so I'll go on with my story. Vell, Miss, the Wicount orrays objected to my usin' his paper, an' pens an' ink, an' vile I was in the middle o' my letter I 'eered his quick foot a dancin' along the passage, an' afore I could think vot I vos doin', I bolted into a closet vich was in the chamber, an' shut myself in, a 'opin' that the Wicount would werry soon hook it ag'in, he did not; for afore he had seated hisself down two minnits, the room-door opens, and there was instantly much rustlin' o' silk. Vich, Miss, at that 'ere moment I found the cupboard so 'ot I was obliged to open the door of my apartment a little, to get a trifle o' hair. Through that 'ere little crack I seed Miss Plantagenet looking as vite as a plaster himage, and her eye flashing like that of a thorough-bred colt wot's uneasy in its mind. She speke to him as if he'd greatly worried her, and she called him a willin', which he said he warn't, for he'd wooed her 'onnerable, an' he'd married her."

"Married her!" echoed Floret, intensely interested in his communication, conched though it was in such execrable English.

She understood it perfectly, however. She had heard that species of idiomatic talk too often not to be able to interpret it.

"Ay, married her, Miss," continued Nat. "An' as to prove his vords she perduced the cettyfikit, vich she said as she'd 'ad morn' a 'nuff of him, she was quite willin' to burn," an' burn it she did, there an' then, though not until she'd read out all that was written on it, an' pintoed out to the Wicount how the witnesses as



was all drowned, 'or dead, or gone away to some other part o' the world; an' how, as the secret was their own, they could keep it, an' nobody be none the wiser. An' she told 'im he might marry the daughter of a railway contractor if he chose—she did it all herself, every bit on it—"

A deep, heavy sigh, escaped the lips of Floret.

"Yes," continued Nat, "the Wicount took it werry colly, even when she drew off her wedding-rings, an' scrunched 'em beneath the 'eel of her boot. O Jemima! I thinks I see 'er now, as tossin' of 'er 'and in the hair, she deelin'd to be seed by him to her carriage, and left him—not a lock of her beautiful 'air—but a cuss—"

"No, no!" exclaimed Floret, faintly, shrinking back from him.

"Ah, but she did tho'!" persisted Nat. "Not a cuss in violent langvidge; but sez she, 'I leaves you with nothin' but my cuss!'"

He suited the action to the word, with an air which would have been ludicrous but for the terrible reflections it conveyed, and Floret covered her face with her hand.

Nat perceived this, and assuming a very penitential manner, he said:

"I begs your parding, Miss; but I sees I'm distressin' on you, vich I don't wish to do. I s'pose it's nateral, however, as I am speakin' o' your own father and mother—but, then, Miss, lor' bless you, it ain't nothin' particklar for two married parties to do a little friendly cussin' at each other nows an' thens. Married life ain't orvays endless flicity. A 'usband sometimes objects, an' a wife sometimes objects, an' ven they both objects together, there's sure to be a trifle o' cussin' on von side or the other, p'raps on both—"

"You are greatly distressing me!" suddenly exclaimed Floret, sternly and impatiently. "I request that you will at once come to the object of your visit to me or retire."

Nat gazed at her for a mement, and then, with a gesture of respect, said:

"I am comin' to it, Miss, as fast as I can, an' I'm sure I yon't distress you if I can 'elp it. Now, I've got a copy o' that 'ere cettyfikit of marriage, vich I vent to Brighton a'ter myself, an' paid the clerk for it. A good deal o' trouble I've 'ad to keep it; but here it is!"

He produced from a pocket-book a folded paper; and as he opened it a hissing whisper ran through the room, which sounded in his ears exactly like the word, rascal:

"Rascal!"

He looked sharply at Floret's face, but her eyes were fastened upon the folded paper, and her lips were compressed together: it was certainly not she who uttered the word.

He looked anxiously round the apartment, and pointed to the door of the bedchamber.

"All right, there?" he said, suggestively.

Floret, however, gazed upon him so haughtily, that he did not press his question.

"You see, Miss, I have the copy of the cettyfikit," he proceeded; "and I've got—that

is, I know vere to lay my hands on 'em, an' that's the same to me as 'avin' 'em—the bits o' rings vith writin' engraved on 'em, all proofs o' the marriage. Now, Miss, you see that Miss Plantagenet is the Marchioness o' Vestchester, because she's been an' gone and married agin vile her fust husband's alive, and the Wicount is now the Earl o' Brackleigh, an' he, too, 'as been an' gone an' married ag'in. Now, neether o' them marriages are worth a straw; the fust is the only genevine von, and you are the daughter o' that fust marriage, vich, ven I bin an' prov'd, vill make you a lady o' title an' great wealth. Now, Miss, as nobody can prove this 'ere but your 'umble servant to co-mand, Natanel Ferret, to be short an' to the pint, you must pay me werry 'ansomely to do it.

"You may be able to prove the marriage of which you have spoken," responded Floret, as he ceased, articulating her words with much difficulty, "but how are you prepared to prove that I am the daughter of the first marriage, as you express it?"

This was rather a poser for Nat, but he coughed, and hemmed, and moved about a little uneasily, until he could catch an idea, because he was quite aware that, though able to prove the marriage, he was in no condition to prove the birth of a child subsequently. With rather a longer preliminary cough than any of the preceding, he said:

"Vy, Miss, that's the werry easiest thing in life. I knows the way to go about it. Fust, you see, you're azackly like the Marchioness, as like as two peas in von pod. An' then, you see, Miss, that I'm vith the Earl o' Brackleigh still. He can't afford to part vith me, he can't: I knowa too much for 'im. An' then, Miss, that 'ere fair party as is to run in double harness vith me ven ve carries on the public-house business, is the vaitin'-maid o' the Marchioness of Vestchester—her confidential maid, Miss. She vill tell me anythin', she vill; and 'as soon as ever you wants to see the Marchioness some fine evenin', ven she's a takin' her valks in the garden, you tells me, I tells Fane, Fane 'ints to the Marchioness a valk in the garden vill do her good, she fancies she's goin' to see the Earl o' Brackleigh, she sez she vill take her advice, Fane tells me, I tells you, you goes there for a valk, too, you meets her, an' you sez to her—O, Jemima!"

Nat suddenly staggered back several paces as he made the exclamation, and was about to make a bolt to the door, when a loud, imperious voice commanded him to stay, and he stood still, like a cur that expects to be beaten.

The Countess of Brackleigh had entered the room as he uttered the last observation, and he caught sight of her in the very middle of his exciting description of the manner in which he should propose to prove to Floret that she was the legitimate daughter of the Marchioness of Westchester.

"Give me the paper which you have stolen from me," said the Countess, approaching him closely.



Nat looked at her beseechingly.

"I beg your parding, my Lady," he commenced.

"Give it me without a word," she interrupted, sternly, "or take immediately the consequences of your rascality."

He, with very genuine reluctance, tendered the copy of the certificate to her. She almost snatched it from him, and opened it to see that he had not deceived her by substituting another paper for it. As she was running her eye over it, he said to her, in a frowning tone:

"I—a—I—a—presumes your ladyship overheard my little proposal to this young lady, 'ere."

"Every word," replied the Countess, curtly, "Then," he continued, in the same tone, "your ladyship vill know——"

"That you are acquainted with the Marchioness's confidential woman, and can, through her, make assignations between the Marchioness and the Earl your master," exclaimed the Countess, looking pale, and resembling, in Nat's eyes, at least, one of the Fates.

"I did not go azactly to say that, my lady," he responded, deprecatingly.

The Countess waved her hand, with an angry, impatient gesture:

"Silence!" she exclaimed. "It is for you to listen and obey, not to speak. Now, mark well what questions I shall put to you, and answer them truhfully, or within half an hour from this time you shall lie manacled in a jail."

"Nat looked at her and trembled. He knew very well that if he attempted to thwart or trick her now, that she would keep her word; and, unfortunately for him, she could keep her word.

"Firstly," she said, after a minute's consideration, "I wish to refer to that interview which took place between the Viscount Bertram and his then wife, while you were hidden in the closet, and I call upon you to tax your memory closely."

"It is so werry long ago, your ladyship," he muttered, uneasily.

"Not so long but that you could remember well enough to repeat some of the words which were used upon that occasion."

"Because they wus so werry startling, he suggested.

"Silence!" she exclaimed, sternly, and then looking at him fixedly, to his apparent uneasiness, she said, "Did Miss Plantagenet mention, when speaking of the witnesses to this document, the name of Shelley?"

"Shelley?" he echoed.

"No iteration!" she rejoined, quickly. "Did she speak of one Frances Shelley?"

Nat put his thumbs into the armboles of his waistcoat, and looked up at the ceiling and then down at the floor, and went through several small performances to denote that he was probing his memory very severely.

"Do you wish me to call in aid to quicken your recollection?" added the Countess, in a

low, determined tone, which made his flesh crawl. "Frances Shelley was the foster-sister of the Marchioness; did she speak of her?"

"Her foster-sister!" repeated Nat, as though the mention of that nominal relationship had brought a gleam of light to his powers of remembrance. "Of course, the Marchioness did, my Lady. Frances Shelley, to be sure she did."

"What did she say about her?—quick, it is very dangerous for you to attempt to trifle with me in my present mood," exclaimed the Countess, tapping the floor with her foot.

"She said, my Lady, if my mem'ry ain't at fault, my Lady," replied Nat, slowly, "that Frances Shelley was her foster-sister."

"Well!" ejaculated the Countess, shortly and sharply.

"She said, I think, that she was devoted to her."

"Well!"

"An' I think she said as she knew she'd die for her."

"Well!"

"And that she was going away to Orstralear, or to Columby, or some other place."

"Go on."

"An' that she would never come back no more."

"Is that all?"

"I think she said summat, my Lady, about its breaking her heart to stop away for ever, but that she was sure she would never come back."

"What more?"

"Nothin' more, my Lady."

"Are you sure?"

"Upon my s—word, my Lady!" he said, with some emphasis, catching himself up from the utterance of an oath.

The Countess turned to Floret and said:

"Do you believe that the woman's devotion to her foster-sister remains unchanged?"

"I do," replied Floret, unhesitatingly.

"We shall have a more difficult task w' a her than I at first calculated upon," muttered the Countess. "We must proceed cautiously. There is one step, however, which shall be taken."

She turned to Nat, and said, in an authoritative tone, to him:

"Retire to the door for a minute, but do not quit the room."

Then, addressing Floret, she said, in a low tone:

"It is but just that you should have an interview with your parents when they are together. You have seen each alone, and they have denied you; but I do not believe that this refusal to acknowledge you is the result of concerted action. If you were to appear before them at an unexpected moment, it is more than probable that nature would triumph over every personal or worldly consideration. If they acknowledge you, it may have the effect of changing our plans, and rendering unnecessary much that must be done if they persist



in disowning you; I will forego much if they exhibit toward you a touch of common humanity. Have you the courage to face them?"

"What have I to fear?" asked Floret, earnestly. "My cause is at least a good and a just one. The injuries which have been wrought have fallen upon me. It is I who have to complain, not they. I will readily make the attempt, for it is my most earnest wish that they should both acknowledge me to be their child, and, under the present unhappy circumstances, that they should do so in secret."

"It shall be as you wish," rejoined the Countess. "But," she thought, "the Marquis of Westchester shall make one of the party. It is but fair that he should attend such a meeting."

She beckoned Nat, who had kept his eye upon her, to her side.

"Remember," she said, "that you are my slave. I have promised you a reward. You shall have the woman of whom you have spoken for a wife, and funds to purchase the house for which you are longing; but it must be after you have served me faithfully and truly. Now, tell me, has the Marchioness given any message, through her maid and you, to the Earl?"

Nat looked upon the ground, he twisted his hat round, he smoothed his beaver with the cuff of his coat, he moved his feet uneasily, and coughed.

"Answer me!" she exclaimed, fiercely.

"The Hurl will kill me, my Lady, if I 'blows' upon him," he said, huskily.

"Have you thought of the consequences of opposing me?" she asked him, in a sharp, pointed tone.

"I don't wish to do it," deprecated Nat; "but—"

"What is the message?" she half shrieked, with passionate vehemence.

"That the Marchioness will be at the Countess of Newmarket's reception to-morrow night, alone. She will arrive there at eleven, and her carriage will call for her at twelve."

"Enough," responded the Countess; "you may go. Deliver your message to the Earl; and, remember, not a word or a hint of what has transpired here to-day, as you value wife, house—even your life! Go! not a word!"

Nat bowed, and slunk out, steaming with heat, and with words bubbling upon his lips which were not in any respect flattering to the Countess.

As soon as he had disappeared, the Countess caught Floret in her arms.

"We will go to the reception, too," she said, earnestly; "there they must listen to you; they dare not thrust you from them; and they may—they, no doubt, will—quietly but certainly receive you with the acknowledgments you desire, and make arrangements that the recognition shall be more ample at a future meeting."

Floret trembled, but did not reply.

While pressing her to her bosom, the Countess decided to write to the Marquis of Westchester, and request him to meet her at the reception of the Countess of Newmarket.

## CHAPTER XLII.

"Such to his troubled soul their turn,  
As the pale death ship to the storm,  
And such their omen dim and dread,  
As shrieks and voices from the dead—  
That pang, whose transitory force  
Hovered 'twixt horror and remorse;  
That pang perchance his bosom press'd."

—SCOTT.

Poor Floret, in having consented to accompany the Countess of Brackleigh to the Countess of Newmarket's reception, was compelled to make a compromise with her spirit of independence.

She very soon made this discovery, and made it, too, with a species of silent dismay. The proceeds arising from the manufacture of artificial flowers, and the gains accruing from the better though far from adequately remunerated labor of embroidery and Berlin wool-work, promised to go a very little way toward the purchase and making of a dress which would barely pass muster at such an assembly as that which would gather at the Countess of Newmarket's.

The Earl of Newmarket's hobby was racing; he had indubitably the largest and most valuable racing-stud in England, and, therefore, in the world. His Countess prided herself on giving the most distinguished entertainments to the very highest people, and the most brilliant parties to the largest number of guests that could be drawn together under one roof. She made it a feature, too, that the dresses worn upon such occasions should be of the gayest and costliest kinds, and she herself set up a rivalry among the fair visitors in the production of jewels worn as adornments to the person.

The Countess of Brackleigh, acquainted with these features in the entertainments of the Countess of Newmarket, enlarged upon them to Floret, who, with a sinking of the heart well known to young ladies placed in a similar predicament, reflected that she had "nothing to wear". She hastily submitted her position to the Countess, and begged to be permitted to recall her consent to accompany her thither; but the latter declined to absolve her from her promise, and even argued her into an assent to allow her to provide her with her attire and jewels for the occasion.

After some hesitation, Floret made a compromise with her conscience by agreeing to wear the same light blue dress which she had worn at Brackleigh House when she had her first interview with the Earl, and any jewels which the Countess might think proper to lend her.

With the arrangement that she should send her carriage on the next day, at four, for Floret, the Countess took her departure, too



much occupied with her thoughts to remember Lord Victor and Hyde Vaughan, who were awaiting her pleasure in an apartment below, discussing the probability of Ida turning out to be Hyde's half-cousin.

Finding that the Countess had quitted the house without seeing them again, they immediately went in search of their respective inamoratas; but Ida, trembling, burning, blushing, resolutely kept out of sight, and Floret was too much excited by her previsions of the ordeal she should have to go through on the following evening to support an interview with Lord Victor. Upon her intimating this to him, he very considerably took his departure, and made Hyde go with him.

But not until he had ascertained that Floret would accompany the Countess of Brackleigh to the Countess of Newmarket's on the following evening.

He silently resolved to go there, too, although, owing to his recent bereavements, he would be obliged to pay his visit incognito. This, he knew, could be easily managed.

The Countess, having secured Floret's consent to wear the dress and jewels which she should provide, did not hesitate as to the course which she thought it best to pursue. She, therefore, returned home at once, instructed her maid, Subtle, to make the dress which Floret had worn into a parcel, and carry it to her carriage, which she had ordered to await her at the door.

As soon as it was placed there, she drove to the first silk-mercier's in London, and having selected one of the most exquisite and richest fabrics that was ever produced by a silk loom, she proceeded with it to her dressmaker's, and gave orders that it should be made up to resemble the dress she had brought with her as a pattern, which was to be departed from only wherever an alteration was required by the difference of fashion.

As her dressmaker employed upward of fifty young ladies, with no settled hours of labor whenever there was a pressure of business, the dress was readily promised to be ready by four the next day, and at the hour named, it was delivered for the Countess at Brackleigh Mansion.

On her way home, the Countess paused at a stationer's shop, which she saw was also a post-office, and, alighting, she entered the shop, and called for writing materials.

On being supplied with them, she wrote the following note:

"If the Marquis of Westchester has any consideration for his honor, and would preserve his noble name untarnished, he will be present to-morrow evening at the Countess of Newmarket's reception. The Marchioness of Westchester has already made an engagement to be there at eleven. The Marquis should be cautious and circumspect; he must not reveal to any one his intention of appearing at the reception."

She sealed this mysterious epistle, addressed it, marked it "strictly private", and placed it in the letter-box herself, and then returned home.

As she now seldom even saw the Earl of

Brackleigh, and when she did they did not speak, she did not acquaint him with any of her movements; and he, so absorbed in making secret arrangements for a flight from England, which he had resolved should last so long as the Countess lived, did not trouble himself to ascertain what she did or whither she went. She, however, did not lose sight of Ned Ferret. She set her maid, Subtle, upon him as a spy—a congenial task to her; and as soon as she knew that he had an interview with the Earl, after her own with him in Floret's apartments, she waylaid him, and learned from him that the Earl had received from him the Marchioness's message, and intended to keep the appointment.

She, therefore, went on with her preparations.

At the same time, the Marchioness of Westchester, who, notwithstanding her outrageous menaces to the Marquis, had not the smallest intention of in any respect fulfilling them, was preparing also for the party at the Countess of Newmarket's palatial residence, and had resolved on this particular occasion to outvie her competitors in the splendor of her dress, and in the value and matchless beauty of her jewels.

By one of those remarkable coincidences which sometimes occur in actual life, the silk-mercier whom she patronized exhibited to her precisely the same patterned fabric, of an exactly similar material, texture, and hue—from, indeed, the same loom—as that which the Countess of Brackleigh had purchased for Floret. The mercer, fully believing the statement of the manufacturer of whom it had been purchased by his buyer, declared it to be perfectly unique; and with the impression that she alone should appear in a dress of this hue and pattern, she ordered it to be made up for her.

She had been induced to select it because the colors were such as to suit her complexion. The design was a peach-colored rose-leaf, winding into graceful forms upon a pale blue ground, which was shot with white, and formed a combination of such remarkable beauty, that it was quite impossible that such a dress upon an elegant woman could pass unnoticed.

The Marquis, who had received cards for the reception, had tossed them aside, not intending to be present. Indeed, after his late fearful scene with the Marchioness, he had resolved not only not to go into society again, but to prevent the Marchioness doing so, until he had satisfied his terrible suspicions. If the result of his investigations should render a separation imperative, he determined to go abroad, and live there the remainder of his life. If, on the contrary—which he found it difficult to suppose—she came out clear, he purposed entering into some arrangement with her which should place them upon a more satisfactory footing.

He felt and was ill. The exciting scene with the Marchioness, which could not be concealed from his servants, and her crowning



terrific insult respecting his origin, had harried him into a fit, and he was now suffering from its effects. The Marchioness he believed to be still ill, and confined to her chamber—so he was, in fact, informed by her maid, Fane—and, therefore, gayeties and receptions appeared to him to be out of the question.

He was seated alone in his study, his medical attendant having just quitted him, after impressing upon him the necessity of avoiding everything approaching excitement, when a servant entered, and handed him upon a silver salver two letters.

The Marquis glanced at them, took them and threw them upon the table upon which his elbow was resting, and the servant quitted the room.

He was weak, and felt faint, and therefore not in a mood to read letters which, he presumed, could only have reference to business, to which he was not in a disposition to attend, or to solicit patronage or assistance which he was in no frame of mind to grant.

Shortly afterward, while brooding with all the sickening agony of a desperate jealousy, his eye accidentally took notice of the fact that both letters were marked "private and confidential."

The tone of his thoughts made such an addition to each superscription painfully attractive to him; and he snatched both up with trembling fingers, and examined the respective handwritings. One was small, beautifully neat, and evidently that of an educated lady: the other was the short, vigorously-formed letters which usually indicate a cool, determined, and inflexible mind.

He turned them over and over, examined the postmarks and the seals—both were gummed envelopes, with the device of the flower "forget-me-not"; and at last, with a cold numbness tingling his fingers, he opened as the first the one which bore the handwriting of the female.

It was the one which had been addressed anonymously to him by the Countess of Brackleigh. He read the contents through in an instant, and felt, as he did so, as though a shaft of lightning had passed through his brain and slain him.

He sank back, cold, paralyzed, powerless, by the allusion to the preservation of his honor, and the appointment which had been made by the Marchioness. A deadly faintness spread itself over him, and he believed that he was about to have a repetition of the former fit.

The violence, the rage, the torments of his jealousy, however, lifted him out of his prostration, and he paced the room under feelings of intense excitement. Of course, conjectured the worst; he surmised a thousand things that would not happen, and a hundred that could not. There is, perhaps, little difference in this respect between jealous men and jealous women; but, if there is, we incline to the belief that women's brain being the most fertile and erratic in such matters, she conjures up more exaggerations, improbabilities, and

impossibilities, than her prototype of the opposite sex.

However, the Marquis's powers of invention were sufficiently ample, and he coined a variety of incidents, in which the Marchioness would play a principal part so derogatory to his honor as to almost drive him delirious.

While anathematizing her in terms the most vituperative of which language is capable, his eye caught a glimpse of the second letter, marked also, "private and confidential".

He caught it up, wondering what new informant that his honor was in danger had indited this second epistle, and opened it. With feelings of bitter dismay he read as follows:

"MY LORD:—You will remember that when you were a Captain in the Guards, I was a Corporal in your regiment, and acted as your regimental servant. You cannot forget, also, that I acted confidentially for you in various little affairs of the heart. I had not a very scrupulous conscience, or in all probability, I should never have forfeited an excellent position in society, I should never have enlisted in the regiment which was honored in having you for its Captain, and I certainly should never have been favoured with your entire confidence. I mean that confidence which needs an agent not particular with regard to the work he undertakes to do, and which is supposed to be retained and not abused, so long as certain terms of agreement are performed and fulfilled on both sides.

"Much that I did for you would come under the denomination of heartless impropriety—some would give it a harsher name; but I, who know women well, know, too, that a broken heart means only the interval between the desertion of the old love and the netting of the new.

"With one exception, however, the whole of those *liaisons* are settled and done with. They are only matters of memory, if even that, because the law could not and cannot touch them; but the one exception is, unfortunately for you, one that the law can reach.

"Read what follows attentively.

"You cannot fail to remember meeting at a ball a young lady, who had just been brought out—by name, Ada Vian. You were much attracted by her beauty, and you set me to work to convey letters to her; and when she— which she very soon did—wrote to you, to be her messenger likewise.

"You tried very hard to induce her to elope with you; but, as nothing whatever would pacify her scruples but the ceremony of marriage, you gave me a sum of money, and *carte blanche* instructions to carry out the affair, so that, while it closely resembled the real thing, it should be a mere fraud, which could at any time be set aside. It was an old ruse, but a task not very easy to manage successfully. I set to work to do as you wished; but, as I, too, was obliged to employ a confidant to play one of the parts, I engaged a brother of mine, who was then a lawyer's clerk, to act with me. He deceived me most



treacherously. He was—ha! ha!—a lawyer's clerk, too!—troubled with scruples of conscience, of which, by the way, he said nothing to me, and he coaxed me to let him manage the whole matter. You recollect how well it was done; you complimented me, and paid me handsomely for accomplishing the thing so well. Ada Vian, after the ceremony, eloped with you, and lived with you not only as your wife, but she was your wife.

"Be attentive!

"You, at the time of which I am writing, had a truly aristocratic dislike to be bored with details. It was enough for you that you met, at the place and time appointed, the persons whom you expected to meet; that you made certain responses you were called upon to make; and that you went away with your young, shrinking, blushing prize, whom you believed you had completely tricked, and should successfully ruin.

"My brother's scruples of conscience trotted off with him the moment I had resigned the arrangement of the plan into his hands to a clergyman, to whom he made a clean breast of the matter. This clergyman went at once secretly to Ada Vian, and at a private interview found that she had surrendered her heart and her mind to you; that she was bent upon being married to you; that if she were not, it would break her heart; and that no reasoning which he could advance influenced her in the slightest degree to the contrary. He came back to my brother, and acquainted him with the result of his mission, and also that he, as had been agreed upon previously between them, had not informed Miss Ada Vian that you purposed making her your mistress by a trick. It was then arranged, in order to save the girl from destruction, that the marriage-ceremony should be legal and complete in all respects. The banns were published at the parish church in which you were both residing, a long three weeks, if you will recall the period in which you were engaged writing letters to urge her to comply with your request to give you her hand and fly with you. You obtained her assent, and the marriage took place at the small chapel-of-ease, obtained, as you supposed, by bribery. You will remember that the clergyman not only filled up a printed form, which he handed to Miss Ada, but he very emphatically and significantly assured you that you were a married man. You laughed pleasantly afterward, and said 'how capitally the fellow had acted.'

"I regret this epistle should prove so long, but it is impossible to shorten it. You were, as you perceive, lawfully and legally married to Ada Vian."

The Marquis sank back in his chair and gasped for breath.

He remembered every incident perfectly well, and this was the first intimation that he had received that the ceremony was not a mere fiction—a wicked and a cruel deception, which at the time he had thought 'clever.'

One consolatory reflection, however, came

to his aid: the woman of whom his correspondent was writing was dead; so, with knitted brow and set teeth, he went on with the perusal of the letter. It was continued thus:

"You lived with your young wife continuously for a very brief period. She was too fond of you from the first, and you, therefore, quickly began to tire of her. Then you framed excuses to account for the long absences passed with others of her sex. You employed me still as your agent to convey messages to her, and to be the bearer of money, which, as I was then in difficulties, I shared with her, without her becoming a party to the arrangement. She had a child; then, in your anxiety to be free, you offered me a handsome sum to get rid of both. An opportunity was soon found, for, thrown into a condition of ill-health by harsh language, cruel letters, and an absence scarcely short of desertion, she went out of her mind. She was, the very moment that we discovered her insanity, placed by us, my Lord, in a lunatic asylum—we both swore strongly on that occasion, I fear Under an assumed name, the child was placed at nurse in Yorkshire, and just at that time I saw an opportunity of doing well in Australia. I sought an interview with you, and told you that the young woman with whom you had gone through a mock marriage, and whom you had deserted, was dead. You believed me, without taking the trouble to inquire whether I had spoken the truth or not, and presented me with a sum of money, as well as procured my discharge from the Army. We parted, as you supposed, for ever. Before I went away, I visited your wife, who was not dead, at the lunatic asylum; and though she was still insane, she recognized me, and asked after you and the child. I wrote down the address of those who had charge of the latter on a piece of paper, and gave it to her. I told her that if she mentioned where it was to be found to any one, she would never be permitted to see it again, and that enough money had been paid for its support until it would be a grown girl of twelve years old. She seemed to understand me, and concealed the paper. I went away from the place with, I confess, a very mean opinion of my manhood. That she might not be left wholly helpless, I informed her friends where she might be found, but I told them not a word about you.

"I have returned home a beggar. I find that you got married about a year after I left England, and that, therefore, you are in an awkward position with respect to your second marriage. Your wife is still living, and, perhaps, your daughter also; but I have not yet been down to Yorkshire to ascertain whether she is or not. The clergyman who married you is also living. My brother is now an eminent solicitor, still troubled with inconvenient scruples, and if he knew that you were the Captain Wolverton who married Ada Vian, he would not rest until he established that marriage, and upset your present one. I



have your secret. I believe I am the only person who can betray you. What is your secret worth? You are now a rich Marquis—you had always very high expectations—your name and reputation must be dear to you. Can you put a price on your secret? Reflect. I will be at your house between eleven and twelve to-morrow night. You dare not refuse to see me. The name I shall give to your porter will be, Captain Parrot, of the Sydney Mounted Rifles.

"I have the honor to be, my Lord, your faithful, devoted, and humble servant,

"You Know Who."

It would be difficult to decide which of the two letters the Marquis had thus received occasioned him the most perturbation.

The first worked his jealous passions up to a state of frenzy; the second paralyzed him with consternation. A dim sense that what he had been suffering, and what he was likely to suffer, had in it a spice of retribution for what he had regarded as youthful follies—that is to say, that he was about thirty when he believed that, by a consummate artifice, he had ruined, broken the heart, and destroyed the reason of Ada Vian, a girl of seventeen. He, when he married Constance Plantagenet, now the Marchioness of Westchester, gave up his "flirtations", as he termed them, and applied himself to the maintenance of his dignity, and the unsullied integrity of his name. He was startled when Constance had, at the very outset of their married life, repulsed him; and he fell back on his pride, in the expectation that she would sacrifice her haughty coyness, and woo him as he had been so often wooed. She never did; her conduct had always been based on a species of scorn for him, and a curious disregard for his honor, which she would probably injure the very moment she felt disposed to rouse him, perhaps in mere wantonness of spirit, to a pitch of madness. He forgot, all the while he was betraying his jealousy of her, and loading her with the vilest suspicions, what his own conduct had been. He thought only of the name of Westchester, placed on a pinnacle of snow, being smirched by this woman; he did not remember what he had himself done to darken it. He had been a heartless libertine, and he looked back upon his past with complacency. He tried to find out the past of Constance, so that, if he found it not as spotless as purity itself, he might denounce it in terms which would have no limit in their harshness. He had feared that she, his supposed wife, could alone defame him; he began to be frightened now, not only that he should himself destroy the fair reputation the name of Westchester yet bore, but that he should give to the Marchioness the right to turn round upon him, and crush him with indignant wrath at being the victim of his deception, and with her bitter, scornful, insulting taunts, one of which yet rankled like a poisoned barb in his heart.

He paced the room literally beside himself

with agony and consternation: What was to be done? The man must be seen and silenced. It was strange that he never, for a moment, questioned the truth of the statements in the letter. He remembered the device of the mock wedding; he believed, at the time, that it had been excellently acted; he remembered now, with a pang which was almost insupportable, that at the very moment that he was going through what he supposed to be a sham ceremony, he was struck by the thought that, if that were a mockery, the real one was little better. He recollected that he had been reproved by the disguised clergyman—as he had imagined him to be—for not then making the responses clearly, audibly, and correctly, and that he had compelled him to do so. He remembered, with startling vividity, placing the ring upon the finger of Ada—all—all that had passed, even to her throwing herself into his arms, murmuring, "My dear, dear husband!" and his own response of "My sweet wife!"

He groaned in despair. Ay—what was to be done? The girl was living, was his true wife, and a lunatic! The very idea filled him with distraction; for he loved not her, but loved Constance with a mad passion, which grew stronger with every rebuff from her, and every jealous suspicion he received and entertained of her.

He taxed his brain for some course to steer, but his thoughts ran so wild he could not collect them; he could not shape out a path. He felt that he could not escape an interview with the man who had assumed the name of Captain Parrott; but what was likely to follow it, he was unable to conjecture. To listen to what he had to say, to receive his proposal for the purchase of his secret—perhaps at the price of half his fortune—were the only palpable ideas which presented themselves, and to this most unpleasant necessity he was convinced he must bow.

He was about to give orders respecting the reception of Captain Parrot, when a reference to his letter showed to him that he had made his appointment for the precise time at which the letter in the handwriting of a woman assured him the Marchioness would be keeping an assignation with some person at the Countess of Newmarket's reception.

It was impossible to remain away from the Countess's, although it was his intention to proceed there alone, and, if possible, to enter there unannounced. But what was he to do with Captain Parrot during the time? He snatched up the letter of the Countess of Brackleigh, and re-read it. The writer evidently knew that a wrong to him was intended; for she was particular in mentioning his honor, the hour of appointment, and the necessity of not breathing a word of his intention to join the Countess of Newmarket's party. He rang his bell sharply, and on his valet entering, he said:

"Send Lady Westchester's waiting-woman, Fane, for me, I wish to give her a message to—a—a—her mistress."



The valet disappeared, and, shortly afterward, Fane made her appearance, looking prettier than ever—and so demure!

She stood at a respectful distance, and the Marquis eyed her face closely and searchingly.

"This girl cannot be deceitful," he thought.

He crumpled the Countess's letter in his hand, and said, in a somewhat bland tone:

"Come closer, Fane, I desire to speak with you."

She looked at him with some surprise, and a sudden flush rushed up into her cheek. She drew closer to him slowly, until she stood beside his table.

"You have served Lady Westchester for some years," he said, in an undertone.

"Yes, my Lord," she replied, meekly.

"And faithfully, I have no doubt?" he pursued.

"I hope so, my Lord," she answered, humbly.

"Lady Westchester has been kind to you?" he suggested, somewhat artfully.

"O, yes, my Lord, very kind," responded Fane, quickly.

"And rewarded you liberally for services which you have rendered to her?" he continued.

"Her Ladyship has been very kind to me, my Lord, and I hope I am very grateful to her for it," responded Fane, as demurely as before.

"And you are very devoted to her, I suppose?" he added, eyeing her face attentively.

"Very, my Lord," she returned, calmly.

"And you would rather suffer death than betray any one of her secrets, I suppose?" he said, with a sickly smile.

She raised her eyes to his. He saw that they wore an expression of undisguised surprise.

"My Lord!" she ejaculated, interrogatively, as though she did not hear aright.

He repeated his remark.

She shook her head and let her eyes fall again. As they drooped, they rested upon the open letter upon the table, and she saw, with a feeling of curiosity and surprise, the signature appended: "You Know Who!"

"My Lord," she returned, as though she had not noticed that epistle, and it was not running in her mind, "I was not aware that my Lady had any secrets, and if she had, I am quite sure that she would not intrust them to a person so humble as myself."

He looked at her, and rising up he paced the room, muttering with grating teeth:

"There is no difference in women, they are all alike; and if there is one thing more than another for which they have the least regard, it is truth. This girl is, I am sure, deep in Lady Westchester's confidence, yet she affects to know nothing but what such a servant should know."

He turned to Fane, who had placed her back to the letter, which was lying on the top of some loose papers, and said:

"How is the health of Lady Westchester?"

"Improving, my Lord," replied Fane, looking up at him under her eyebrows, somewhat too archly for the relation in which she stood to him.

"Ah!" he answered, removing his eyes from hers, quickly. "I am pleased—I am glad—that is well. Has your Ladyship taken an airing to-day?"

"Yes, my Lord," she replied, in a simple tone.

"She has?" inquired the Marquis, brusquely, "when?—what for?"

"Only for an hour or two, my Lord," returned Fane, as if slightly frightened; "her Ladyship went, I think, only to her milliner's, my Lord."

That answer was a very unsatisfactory one, for it confirmed his suspicions respecting her intended appointment at the Countess of Newmarket's, on the following night.

"Does Lady Westchester go out to-morrow?" he asked.

"I do not know," my Lord," she replied.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Quite, my Lord," she returned.

"You would know if she were going to—to a reception say?" he said, eyeing her earnestly.

She looked at him archly again, so that he once more withdrew his eyes.

"O, yes, my Lord," she replied, in a very ready tone.

"And you have heard nothing of any such intention on the part of my Lady?"

"I have not, my Lord," she replied promptly, and, it seemed, a little decisively.

At this moment the servant entered with more letters, and the card of Lord Nihilalbum, saying that he requested to see him.

"You may go," said the Marquis to Fane, and, courtesying very low, she glided out of the room.

The letters which the Marquis had received last were unimportant, and he turned them aside, and proceeded to another room, in order to see Lord Nihilalbum.

In the meantime, Fane returned to the Marchioness, briefly related to her what had passed between her and the Marquis, spoke of the letter signed, "You Know Who"; and when the Marchioness expressed the greatest anxiety to know its contents, Fane, to her amazement, produced it and handed it to her.

The Marchioness perused it like one in a stupor. Yet, with an extraordinary effort, she seemed to keep herself collected. She drew out a pocket-book, made extracts from it, and, when she ended, she returned it to Fane.

"Replace it in the same spot from whence you took it. It must not be known that I have seen it," she said, with hurried excitement.

Fane hastened back silently and swiftly with it to the study.

While conversing with Lord Nihilalbum, the Marquis remembered that the letter from Captain Parrot was lying open upon a table in his



study. He abruptly quitted his lordship, and hurried thither.

The room was untenanted, and the letter was lying where he had placed it.

### CHAPTER XLIII.

"In whose saloons, when the first star  
Of evening o'er the waters trembled,  
The valley's loveliest all assembled;  
All the bright creatures that, like dreams  
Glide through its foliage, and drink beams  
Of beauty from its founts and streams.

Majds from the West, with sunbright hair,  
And from the Garden of the Nile,  
Delicate as the roses there—  
Daughters of love from Cyprus rocks,  
With Paphian diamonds in their locks—  
Light Peri forms, such as there are  
On the gold meads of Candahar;  
And they, before whose sleepy eyes,  
In their own bright Cathayan bowers  
Sparkle such rainbow butterflies.  
That they might fancy the rich flowers  
That round them in the sun lay sighing,  
Had been by magic all set flying!  
Everything young, everything fair,  
From east and west is blushing there."

—T. MOORE.

Floret, in spite of her efforts to appear calm and collected, and at her ease, experienced much inward excitement during the morning of the day following the visit of the Countess of Brackleigh to her. She looked forward to the evening's ordeal with a feeling akin to fear, which strengthened as the time approached.

She endeavored to sustain herself as the day wore on, by assuring herself that she had nothing to apprehend; and yet there were silent appeals to her sense of dignity, and it almost seemed of propriety, from a still, small voice, which pressed upon her suggestions that it would have been better not to have adopted the mode selected by the Countess for appearing before her parents at a moment when they would be powerless to repulse her. Better for her own sake, and for theirs.

Indeed, among the many foreshadowings of what might that night occur, which would force their way into her mind, came the impression that it would be precisely in such an assemblage that the Marchioness and the Earl not only could with impunity, but would, with cold and dogged firmness, wholly ignore her; would treat her with frigid scorn, and, if appealed to, taunt her with being a cheat and an impostor.

It was strange, perhaps, that this latter reflection urged her to persevere with her purpose; for, however susceptible she might be to kindness, her nature was not one to brook scorn—the very thought that she might be treated with contumely by those who ought to regard her with gratified pride, roused her to resistance, impelled her to dare any heartless attempt to crush her, and to retort upon it, by a bold and persistent prosecution of her right.

It was certainly a long, painful, disquieting day to her.

To Ida it was one of flutter, of fever, of expectation, of the wildest conceptions, of the

grandest imaginings, of the proudest hopes, and of many small regrets.

Had she been called upon to play Floret's part, it is doubtful whether she would have been in anything like the same state of excitement; but she was so anxious that Floret should turn out as grand a lady as she was supremely beautiful; she was so desirous that she should be received and regarded by the great, the lofty, and the noble, as a being superior even to themselves; she did so heartily wish that every handsome young peer would resign himself, heart, and soul, and mind, to the throes of an intense admiration the instant he beheld Floret, and that the haughtiest and highest-born maidens would bend before her and acknowledge her to be the queen of loveliness; she did so hope that she would be welcomed with delight, would be honored, and receive homage from all present, so that if by chance her unknown parents—for Ida knew not who they were, or were supposed to be—should happen to be there, they would spring forward with ecstasy, and claim with joy and happiness their long-lost child.

And her small regrets were comprised in her fears that Floret would not be able to wear those adornments which should enable her to rival the richest and noblest dame present at the reception.

There were so many little essentials required to make up a perfect style of dress, and they were all so expensive, and so much beyond Floret's means, that she knew that she could not have them; and when she thought of the sidelong glance of disdain with which some proud and rich young beauty would look upon any short-comings which might be palpable in Floret's attire, from want of those means, she sighed with vexation, and hated with all her heart the imaginary proud and rich young beauty of the sidelong glance.

O! how she sighed for illimitable wealth, that she might dress and adorn Floret as she could wish to see her appear! and how she sighed with vexation to think that wealth does not come at a wish!

One thing she set her heart upon, and that was, to see Floret dressed. After long cogitations, and speculations, and contrivances, she, in a roundabout, rambling fashion, extracted from Floret a description of the way to Brackleigh Mansion, and she expressed much disappointment to learn that Floret was unacquainted with the situation of the Countess of Newmarket's residence.

It was some little time before Floret could elicit from her the object with which she pursued her inquiries, but at last it came.

She had formed the intention of waiting at the door of Brackleigh Mansion, that she might see Floret enter the carriage on her way to the reception, and of then hurrying to the residence of the Countess of Newmarket, in order that she might behold her alight and enter with her proud step and noble bearing a grand house, which she was entitled by her birth to visit.



Floret was much moved by this proof of her affection so artlessly expressed; and she folded her arms about her, and kissing her fondly, told her that she should go with her in the carriage to the Countess of Brackleigh's; that she should help her to dress; and that she should not only see her depart, but remain there and see her return. Poor Ida was almost delicious with delight by the arrangement.

At four o'clock precisely, the brougham of the Countess of Brackleigh called for Floret at Mrs. Spencer's. Both she and Ida were ready dressed, awaiting its arrival, and they immediately entered it, and were conveyed direct to the mansion, where, by the instructions of the Countess, they were set down at a private entrance.

Subtle was in waiting to receive them, and the Countess met them at the door of her apartment. She was, at first, surprised at the appearance of Ida; but when she was made acquainted with the cause, she smiled, and welcomed her kindly; so that she felt at her ease, and was able to admire, with wonder and pleasure, the splendor of apartments surpassing in magnificence any she had ever seen.

The dressing of a woman for a grand party must be a very formidable affair. We profess to know nothing of the details—nothing about it, in fact—saying that there have been occasions upon which we have commenced an elaborate adornment of our person about five hours after the fair party who was to be our partner for the nonce, and have ended, without the possibility of adding another touch of improvement, some two hours before she had completed her toilet, and then we were assured that the said fair party had attired herself with unexampled rapidity.

Floret certainly did not prove an exception to this woman's rule, and when the clock struck eleven her toilet was not quite finished.

The hairdresser had presented himself, excelled himself, and departed. A second maid of the countess's, the dressmaker, and Ida, had all by turns, and sometimes together, exercised their most consummate skill, and their unique experience, upon Floret's adornment, and had not completed their labor of love—for such it must be to help to make more beautiful that which is the most beautiful thing in nature—a young, lovely, innocent girl—when the Countess, magnificently dressed, made her appearance, followed by Subtle bearing a series of jewel-cases.

Ida half screamed when they were opened, for there was a tiara, a necklace, brooches, and all of diamonds of the very first water.

The Countess pointed to them—

"You must wear these ornaments," she said to Floret, with a suppressed sigh. "They were a wedding-gift from my father to me, and are valuable enough to serve as a dowry for a duchess."

Floret wore her beautiful hair plain upon the temples, and brought behind her ears, where it was looped up in plaits exquisitely arranged; the tiara of diamonds suited her

style of countenance perfectly, and gave to her additional grace and majesty of appearance.

The rest of the superb jewels fulfilled their respective duties, and completed Floret's appearance, which, as the Countess declared, was faultless.

Poor Ida pressed her hands together as she gazed upon her with tears of joy. She was unable to utter a word; but she thought her more transcendently lovely than she had ever dreamed the fairest of her sex could be made to appear.

Floret did, indeed, look beautiful; she had more than her mother's beauty, all her grace of form, and her peculiarly lofty bearing. Her dress fitted her to perfection, and seemed as though human hands had never touched it. Its fashion was such as to set off her figure to advantage, while the extreme delicacy of its colors, with their pure silvery tone, were especially adapted to harmonize with her clear, snowy, transparent complexion.

And leading her by the hand, as though she were a princess, the Countess descended with her the grand staircase, and passed through the hall, where the servants were arranged to do them homage, and look on Floret with eyes of wonder—and of approbation—for they decidedly approved of the appearance of the countess's "young potterdjay", which, by the way, was their familiar mode of pronouncing the word, protegee.

As they were whirled on in the Countess's handsomest equipage, she informed Floret that she had, during the morning, paid a visit to the Countess of Newmarket.

"I was very anxious to see her on your account, Floret," she said; "I had much to say that was impossible to put into a letter without provoking unpleasant surmises and more embarrassing questions. I, therefore, sought an interview with her, to say to her simply this: 'A young lady friend of mine, nobly-born, but who has not yet been brought out, resembles in a very remarkable degree a lady of *haut ton*, who will be one of your guests to-night. I know you love a sensation; the young lady has a very striking appearance, and is sure to command attention, and I wish that to every inquiry respecting her name the answer to be returned shall be 'Iacognita'. By that name I wish her to be announced, by that name alone I desire her to be known. Your ladyship may rely on my word and my position that the introduction is genuine and unexceptionable.' Those were, as nearly as I can remember, the words which I used; at all events, it was the substance of them. The Countess, as I expected, entered with enthusiasm into my views, and expressed her willingness to keep up your *incognito* as completely as her entire ignorance of your name and history will enable her. You may, therefore, Floret, my dear child, be quite at ease, and free from all embarrassment. You will be regarded as on the level of all there, and will meet with nothing in the shape of a taunt, direct or implied. You will simply be the Unknown, and the family



history of every peer will be gone over to ascertain to which of them you belong."

Floret felt too excited to answer. She bowed, and bowed gratefully too; for she felt how great was the advantage the Countess had obtained for her.

The carriage now fell abruptly into a line of others, and walked slowly on for some distance. Floret saw a dim throng of faces, which were turned toward the carriage-window with eyes of admiration; and her heart, although she strove to suppress it, began to beat wildly.

And now the carriage stops; the door is swung open, and the steps are let down with a crash, and the Countess was handed out. Floret followed; some one, she saw not whom, assisted her. She heard a rapid, murmuring buzz of admiration as she stepped lightly on the crimson cloth which lined the covered way from the carriage to the hall. It sprang simultaneously from the mouths of those who thronged the pavement, and who caught a glimpse of her as she alighted. It made her elevate her head, and walk with a prouder step.

At this very instant, she heard a whisper. It was but a whisper, but it pierced her ear like an arrow.

It said:

"THE POOR GIRL."

She turned her head instantly in the direction from whence the voice proceeded.

She beheld the face of Liper Leper. His brilliant black eyes were fastened upon her with a gleam of admiration and delight.

She heard him ejaculate:

"God is just!"

The next instant, her hand was seized by the Countess, and she could only through her dim eyes see throngs of faces and moving forms, and her dulled ears could hear only a strange chorus of voices, uttering cries of which she could comprehend nothing. She smelt the faint odor of exotics, and a sensation passed over her frame which made her fear that she should swoon away.

The Countess pressed her hand sharply.

"Courage, Floret," she whispered to her. "Your face is as white as marble. You must exert yourself now. Remember from whom you sprang, and sustain the position to which you were born. You are already observed."

These few words re-animated Floret, and she drew herself up erect, but still everything appeared a mere haze to her.

She entered a splendid saloon, in which was seated the Countess of Newmarket, surrounded by a group of distinguished persons, receiving her guests.

"The Countess of Brackleigh—Incognita," shouted a voice, announcing the former and Floret.

Attracted by the peculiarity of Floret's adopted name, every eye of the group was turned upon her.

An exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of all.

"Incognita" appeared to be not only the

most beautiful girl who, perhaps, had ever entered that gorgeous saloon, but she was literally blazing with diamonds, which, in the estimation of those who beheld her, rendered her position unequivocal.

The Countess raised her glass to her eye, and glanced rapidly over Floret's appearance. She looked perfectly amazed.

She beckoned the Countess to her side instantly.

"I am delighted to see you, Lady Brackleigh," she said. "I am equally proud and delighted to receive your fair and lovely young friend, Incognita. My beautiful child, accept my congratulations. Your *ensemble* is a *merveille*. Countess, you have rendered me a distinguished favor; add to it another as great by remaining with your fair charge by my side for a short period."

"With pleasure," responded the Countess.

"Delicious!" ejaculated the Countess of Newmarket, with one of her pleasantest smiles. "My reception to-night will be the white stone of the season."

Every eye of the group which surrounded the Countess was fastened upon Floret, and as this party was composed mostly of young men of high birth who were curvetting through this portion of their life, Floret's beautiful face and figure were specially formed to attract their undivided attention, while her diamonds and her dress drew upon her the notice of the dowagers, the young-old dames, and the old-young maidens, while those who more fairly resembled her could not help calling the attention of their brothers or friends to "that pretty creature".

The Countess of Newmarket was able by experience, though still a young, fine, handsome woman, to observe that Floret was flattered, and not quite at ease, while under the glare of every eye. She, therefore, entered into conversation with her, and spoke to her, and treated her in such a manner that she began, gradually, to feel more calm and collected, to be enabled to look with comprehending eyes upon the scene in which she was evidently playing so conspicuous a part.

"Who is she? Who is she?" quickly ran round the *salon* in whispers; those who knew the Countess of Brackleigh came up to her on the pretence of inquiring after her health, and then requested an introduction to Floret, which they received, being favored only with the name of Incognita. Then men began to ask each other:

"Have you seen Incognita?" "No!" "Oh, by Jove! She is with the Countess of Brackleigh. The loveliest pearl. "Can't find out who she is. Nevaw saw anything so pawfect befaw, by Jove!"

The Countess of Newmarket every now and then kept gazing on the fair young face, as with an expression of admiration it was turned toward the beautifully-dressed women, upon the handsome, well-formed men, and upon the splendidly-decorated apartment. And she gazed with a puzzled look.



Presently she said to Floret, in a low tone :

"I do not intend to take any unfair advantage of you, or to extort from you by a side-winded remark, to whom you are connected, but I think I shall alight presently upon some of your relatives."

Floret colored slightly, and, forcing a smile, she gently shook her head.

"Indeed, I shall," continued the Countess. "I recognize your features as being familiar to me. I am convinced that they closely resemble those of—"

"The Marchioness of Westchester!" loudly exclaimed a voice, unnoticed a new arrival.

A loud and unequivocal buzz of surprise greeted that proud and haughty woman, as with perfect self-possession and majesty of mien she moved slowly and grandly toward the Countess of Newmarket.

An exclamation of astonishment burst from the lips of the latter.

She gazed at the Marchioness, and then at Floret, and again back from one to the other.

The Marchioness wore a dress of magnificent silk, the pattern of which was precisely the same as that in which Floret was attired; it was made in the same fashion, and trimmed in exactly similar style.

The Marchioness wore her hair plain over her temples, and looped in small exquisitely-finished plaits at the back of her head. Upon her brow she wore a coronet of diamonds; round her white throat was a circlet of diamonds; her neck, her waist, her wrists, blazed with diamonds:

If it had been pre-arranged that Floret and she should resemble each other as closely as could be possible in their attire, they could not have more perfectly succeeded.

The Countess of Newmarket, with extended eyelids, looked at the Countess of Brackleigh for an explanation, but the Countess only replied, in an undertone, and with evident excitement:

"Do me the kindness to introduce me and my companion to the Marchioness. You shall know all at a future time."

The Countess found it impossible to resist this bribe, and as the Marchioness of Westchester, who had not yet seen Floret, advanced to her, with a glittering eye, and a strange, defiant kind of smile upon her lip, the latter said, after the first few words of recognition had passed:

"Permit me, Lady Westchester, to have the honor of making two introductions to you. You will be delighted."

The Marchioness bowed, and turning, faced her deadliest enemy.

"The Countess of Brackleigh—the Marchioness of Westchester," exclaimed the Countess, in a light and laughing tone.

The Marchioness seemed to contract and freeze into ice. She nearly closed her eyes, and made not the slightest gesture or movement in response to the very low and sarcastically-profound obeisance which the Countess made to her.

"Let me present the second lady, Marchioness," continued the Countess, not observing the manner of the Marchioness, for her attention was occupied by the expression upon Floret's face. Her eyes were riveted upon the countenance of her mother, and her features seemed to express an anxious hope that she would meet with some unusual attention from her.

"You must make the acquaintance of my charming young friend," she continued, "and that for very obvious reasons. The Marchioness of Westchester—Incognita. I have no better name to offer you, Lady Westchester; you must, like the whole of us, be content with it, and find out the riddle if you can."

The Marchioness opened her eyes, and they rested on Floret's.

For the space almost of a minute their eyes rested on each other's, and seemed in their searching gaze to be endeavoring to penetrate down to their respective hearts, to decipher what was passing there.

Those who stood around gazed in silent wonder at the pair who so remarkably resembled each other, more even as they stood, each with her eyes fixed upon the other's countenance, than they had done previously.

For an instant their faces were exactly alike, and then an expression inexpressibly touching stole over Floret's features. She gazed at Constance with a passionately beseeching look. Mute as the appeal was, it was far more powerful than if it had been made in words of ardent eloquence—but it was made in vain.

While Floret's countenance was full of earnest, tender, pitiful entreaty, her mother's gradually became set and rigid; her eye, which for a moment—for a moment only—appeared soft and liquid, changed its aspect to a cold, stony stare.

She turned her head slowly away, and glancing at the Countess of Newmarket, with a look of ineffable scorn, she moved slowly away.

Strange, perhaps, it was—perhaps the voice of nature would be heard. She, as she departed, turned her eyes furtively upon Floret's face, and a cold, icy pang went through her heart.

The young, sweet face, which a moment before had been instinct with sorrowful tenderness, was now white as death, its features were rigid, and her eye had the same pitiless, stony glance which she had the moment before leveled at her.

She felt her step totter and her crest fall—the girl, in her innocence and in the assertion of her right, looked so proud, and regarded her with such crushing scorn. She increased her pace, and moved toward a floral recess, and hurried at a yet swifter rate, as she heard the voice which all the evening had been lustily exercised, announce:

"The Earl of Brackleigh!"

"Do not mention my name or my presence for the present," abruptly exclaimed the



Countess of Brackleigh to her hostess. She spoke in a tone of entreaty, and the Countess nodded assent.

The Countess of Brackleigh glided away with Floret, stunned, bewildered, unconscious of what was passing around her.

As they moved away, Lord Nihilalbum, who was one of the guests, and whose attention had been drawn to Floret by a young peer, an enthusiastic admirer of female loveliness, exclaimed:

"Monthworthly odd! Incognitaw, too! A—why—ith—a—widelouthly pweptethtewouth! Thaw muht be thome outwageouth mithtawe. I will follow thith Incognitaw and atthk haw—who the dettil the ith: I'm a—thure I know haw!—wath a flowaw gurl. Thith will be an adventhaw—the'th so vevy like the Marchioneth—to tell!"

"The Marquis of Westchester!" announced the inexpressible voice.

#### CHAPTER XLIV.

"To such excess did anger, scorn, and hate Transport him, Reason's guiding light grew dim, And Passion's mastering storm distorted every limb. So that of Hell's foul sprites the most malign, Who saw unwaried the opening avenue, Crept to his heart with still coil serpentine, And at the helm of thought reclining, blew To flame the sparks of hatred, till they grew Hot for revenge; yet still he piqued, still stung His angry soul to agony anew."

—TASSO.

The Marquis of Westchester reached the mansion of the Countess of Newmarket rather late, and in a state of much heat and perturbation, which was not diminished by hearing his name vociferated at every landing, and as he entered the saloon. It had been his wish, and, by putting himself to a little inconvenience, he could have easily managed it, to have entered the building and the rooms quietly, so that his name, if mentioned, would have reached only the ears of his hostess; but a delay at his own house, a longer delay in getting up to the Countess's, and the disturbing thoughts which occupied his distracted brain, caused him to forget his purpose, until, handing his card to the individual appointed to receive it, he suddenly experienced the annoyance of hearing his name yelled out in a shrill, clear voice, which was taken up and repeated by other voices, until he stalked, as white as a ghost, into the presence of the Countess of Newmarket.

He had not even the advantage of passing up with a throng; so that, among the names uttered in rapid succession, his might have escaped notice; but he entered the hall at a momentary lull of arrivals; he was recognized by the servant as a man of distinguished rank; and, therefore, they felt it incumbent upon them to pay homage to his title with their most vigorous power of lungs.

During the early part of that evening, while much occupied by reflections connected with the coming visit of a most unwelcome guest, he had caused certain inquiries to be made re-

specting the movements of the Marchioness.

She was so suspiciously quiet, she so obstinately refused to visit him in his own apartments, or to receive him in hers, and Fane kept so studiously out of his way, that he felt certain that the statements in the anonymous letter from the Countess of Brackleigh were true.

He was at length informed that the Marchioness was dressing for an evening party, and that her carriage was ordered for eleven that night.

He responded only to this piece of intelligence by ordering a servant to request Fane to attend him. While waiting for her arrival, the most gloomy thoughts passed through his mind—those desperate thoughts, indeed, which only too frequently float through the brain of the madly jealous, who know that the object of their love does not reciprocate their love, but is bent on lavishing her affections upon another person.

He tried to stifle or to drive away a horrible thought which would thrust itself into his mind, but without success.

He dreaded the Marchioness making the discovery that she was the victim of an illegal marriage, that—unintentionally, it is true—he had deluded her, that her marriage with him was a mockery, and that she was no wife of his.

He feared her passionate scorn, her bitter reproaches, her disdainful taunts, her contumelious vituperation and scurrility; for he even imagined she would descend to such vulgarity.

If the world were to be informed that she was not his wife, in consequence of that title being legally claimed by another, he had no doubt that she would retort upon him and upon the world, by acquainting it that she had never been other than a phantom consort.

And he was convinced that she would leave him, too, with revilings upon her lips, contempt in her glances, and hatred in her heart—leave him to bestow upon a rival caresses for which he now yearned with a desire which had been wholly unknown to him in the earlier portion of his life.

But he vowed that this result, as he prognosticated and worked it out, should not come to pass. He determined to stop the mouth of Captain Parrot at any cost, or, failing in that, to have the life of his rival, even at the cost of his own.

While in the agonizing throes of these maddening thoughts, he continued to send for Fane, but she came not. She forwarded to him a series of evasive messages, which led him to expect her, "presently"; but she did not make her appearance, and evidently did not intend to make her appearance before him until the Marchioness had departed, and he did not wish to have an interview with her then.

Her last message to him, in reply to an imperative one which he had dispatched to her, informed him that she was at that moment in



close attendance upon the Marchioness, but the instant she had a few moments at her disposal she would, "with pleasure", wait upon him. There was something extremely offensive to the Marquis in the form in which this communication was given to him, and he determined to send no more messages to the woman, if she did not shortly attend him.

Ten o'clock came: he ordered his valet to dress him. Eleven o'clock struck: his toilet was completed, but Fane had neither appeared nor sent to him.

He hurried to a room which overlooked the courtyard, and he saw the Marchioness' carriage standing there, with the coachman dozing upon the box. He was about to turn away, when his attention was attracted by a slight bustle beneath him. He gazed eagerly down, and saw a servant run nimbly to the carriage-door and open it; he beheld a veiled lady spring nimbly into it; he heard the clang of the steps as they were rattled up, and the bang of the coach-door. He saw two of his tall footmen spring upon the footboard at the back of the carriage; he heard one of them call out:

"Ther Kenties of Newmekkit's."

And the carriage rolled swiftly away.

With globules of cold and clammy perspiration gathering thickly upon his forehead, he hurried back to his study with the intention of ordering his brougham to be brought round to the door instantly.

He found Fane there awaiting him. She appeared to have taken unusual pains with her attire, and looked very pretty and very attractive.

The moment she perceived that his eyes were fixed sternly upon her, she smiled with affected coyness, and dropped her eyes upon the ground.

He started, and bit his lip with anger.

"What do you want here?" he asked, sharply and harshly.

Quite unaffected by his sternness of manner, she raised her eyes slowly, and looking at him, steadfastly and archly, replied in a somewhat low tone:

"I thought your lordship wished rather anxiously to see me—and alone," she added, glancing quickly and furtively round the apartment.

"I wished to put a few questions to you, certainly, woman," he retorted, sternly and haughtily, "but the information which I expected to obtain from you I have acquired without you. You can go."

"I am willing to answer any question your lordship may wish to put to me," she returned, in an artfully modulated voice; and, with a peculiarly modest and demure look, which, however, did not appear innocent or ingenuous, she added: "I am sure I am ready to tell your lordship anything I know; I don't wish to conceal anything from your lordship; I am too much attached to—O! I beg your lordship's pardon most humbly—I meant to say, I have far too great respect for your lord-

ship to keep anything hidden from your lordship with which I am acquainted, and which your lordship ought to know."

The Marquis by no means approved of this style of addressing him; but there was something in the matter of her speech which made him nibble at her bait.

He, however, would not look at her eyes, which every now and then she turned full upon him, evidently with the purpose of attracting his; but nearly closing his lids over his own, he said, coolly and sternly still:

"What is there you know, which you presume I ought to know?"

"I can hardly say, my Lord," she returned, artfully, "but perhaps if your lordship were to question me—a—kindly—my Lord—a—I mean—my Lord, without terrifying me—I might be able, perhaps, to prove to you, my Lord, that there is something going on, my Lord, which your lordship ought to know."

If there were anything of a secret and improper nature transpiring, in reference to the acts of the Marchioness, who, he thought, would be so likely to be acquainted with it as this woman, who was constantly in attendance upon her?

He looked at his watch; it was twenty minutes past eleven.

"I cannot attend to you now," he said, hastily; "I have an engagement of importance calling me at this moment—"

The door abruptly opened, and a servant entered, followed by a tall, bronzed, military-looking man, who was dressed in a dark frock-coat, buttoned up to the neck, round which was a black military stock.

"Captain Parrot, of the Sydney Mounted Rifles!" exclaimed the servant.

Fane was instantly all eyes; she stared at the man's face, his attire, his form, features, every characteristic by which she would know him again—stared at him with such a steadfast and curiously-meaning look, that the Captain's notice was attracted to her.

To be the object of inspection to such charming eyes, set in so pretty a face, was more than Captain Parrot's strength of mind could permit him to observe unnoticed or unmoved; he, therefore, deliberately smiled, and slightly nodded at her.

The Marquis, who was gazing upon him with a disturbed, excited, and searching scrutiny, saw this little episode with great offence; he, therefore, scowled at Fane, and pointing to the door, said, angrily:

"Go, woman! I will speak to you further in the morning."

Fane glided swiftly out of the room. As she passed the Captain, she raised her eyes with an arch look to his, which caused him to again respond with an approving smile. Then she disappeared, muttering, as soon as she was alone:

"That's the man. That's Mr. 'You Know Who!' I thought it would be hard if I didn't get to see him, and it will be harder still if he don't try to see me again—that is, if I know



anything of his abominable sex. Won't I get everything out of him? Men are fools, there is no doubt about that?"

The Marquis, in the meantime, motioned to his servant to place a chair for his guest, and retire.

The instant they were alone, the Earl said to him, hurriedly and excitedly.

"Warlock, I never expected to see you again. I never expected to discover that I had been so basely treated by a man to whom I had behaved so well."

"My Lord," interposed the man, whom he called Warlock, "we have not met now to call each other names, but to talk business."

"Very well," returned the Marquis, quickly. "Then I will be prompt with you. What if to me it is worth ten thousand pounds to prove that I have, by a first marriage, a wife living, and that I am therefore able to get rid entirely of my present Marchioness. Tell me what, in such a case, would be the value of my secret, as you term it, to you?"

"Why, ten thousand pounds, of course," rejoined Warlock, instantly, with a cool and complacent manner.

"How?" inquired the Marquis dryly.

"Simply enough," returned Warlock readily; "because I can prove your first marriage!"

"But so can I," retorted the Marquis, quickly and significantly, "and without your aid, which, as a purchasable commodity, would be to me worth nothing. I could easily substantiate my declaration that I have been previously married, by a reference to the chapel, the situation of which I remember, and I could trace out the clergyman, no doubt, without difficulty. I could, now that you are in England, compel you by a subpoena to appear in a court of justice, and upon oath state what you know. I could make you reveal everything, and—"

"Ah!—to be sure, of course, face the penalty of the law, and so forth, my Lord," interrupted Warlock, snapping his fingers; "that all sounds very well, but that is a point I have not overlooked. I have not blundered blindly on to you; I have made inquiries, and I know that—"

"You know nothing, fool!" cried the Marquis, impatiently. "I tell you that the very next half-hour may make your note to me the most welcome boon I ever received in my life, or it may induce me to purchase your silence with a sum which to you will be a fortune. But I cannot stay to parley; while discussing the worth of your knowledge, I may lose the opportunity of discovering a circumstance which may make it valuable to me, and therefore, of some considerable worth to you. You must either remain quietly in this room, without attempting to move from it until my return, or you must call upon me to-morrow."

"We must settle our preliminaries now," returned the man, with a sullen, determined, dogged look. He did not like the tenor of

the remarks which had fallen from the lips of the Marquis.

The latter gazed at him with a fierce look of authority, and said:

"Make your election. You will go or remain; and decide at once, or I will decide for you."

"I can't part with you, my Lord Marquis, until some arrangement has been come to," persisted the man, Warlock, with a firm and decisive manner.

"I have already intimated to you," rejoined the Marquis, haughtily, "that it is not for you, but for me, to make terms. I may reject your overtures with contempt, and dare and defy any revelation which you may have the rascality, to say nothing of the ingratitude, to make, if I think fit, without any justifiable fear of the consequences; or I may see the advantage of taking you once more into my confidence, and of employing you upon certain matters in which your peculiar skill may be, as it has been, successfully displayed. But I cannot listen to any menaces, nor will I. Again, I tell you, that I have not a second to spare, and you must decide one way or the other."

"How long will your lordship be away from this?" inquired the man, not at all approving of a position which, expecting to rule with a high hand, he found to be a little too much the other way.

"It may be an hour; it may be less, it may be more. I cannot say," replied the Marquis, coldly. "I may return very shortly, I may be detained for some time; but I shall be sure to return here, and I shall be equally sure, then, to know the way in which it will be best for me to regard your communication."

"I will remain till you come back, my Lord," said Warlock, after a moment's reflection.

"I will send you some wine instantly," responded the Marquis. "Do not address a servant, nor utter a word until my return."

He passed out of the room, and closed the door behind him. He summoned his valet, and said to him, in a low, peremptory tone:

"I have left a person in my library—he was, years since, a servant of mine, and I wish to extort some information from him which he is disposed to communicate. Take some wine to him; do not converse with him, but lock him in so that he cannot leave, and keep your eye upon the door until my return, which I anticipate will be shortly after twelve."

As he concluded, he hurriedly descended the stairs to the hall, passed quickly through it, leaped into his brougham, and was driven rapidly to the mansion of the Countess of Newmarket.

He walked, with a quick, nervous step, up to the Countess, on entering the *salon*, and paid her a few brief congratulations and compliments upon her good looks and the brilliant character of her assembly.

She appeared not to listen to what



saying, but to be occupied with a curious and earnest scrutiny of his features. Presently she said, in a tone which surprised, piqued, and irritated him :

"Sorry to see you look so white and jaded, Westchester—you are not well, I'm sure. Nothing happened to fret you, I hope?"

"Your ladyship is as full of quiz and banter as ever, I perceive," he responded, with a grim smile.

"Not to you, Westchester," she returned, showing her white teeth in a smile. "You are something like the lordly tiger, not quite the subject to joke with. By the by, I must tell you that I have succeeded in creating an immense sensation to-night."

"Your ladyship cannot fail to achieve that triumph whenever you appear in public," suggested the Marquis, with the same grim, cold smile.

"That compliment is very stale, Westchester," she rejoined, laughing with unaffected enjoyment ; "but it is novel from your lips; for you looked, when you said it, like the royal tiger which I have already mentioned, as though you would snap me up at a mouthful."

"I assure your ladyship," interrupted the Marquis.

"That I should be a very pleasant morsel," interrupted the Countess, laughing, and slightly raising his hand. "Yes, I have frequently been told so; but be good enough to listen to me without interruption, Westchester, for I am exceedingly anxious to draw your attention to the matter. You know that I am fond of doing things unlike any other person, and, to-night, I have here present a young and lovely girl, decked out, I admit, in jewels that should be worn by her mamma; but such jewels! She is of high birth, that I know; but she has not yet been brought out. She is here to-night, that the world may talk of her before she takes the lead of fashion, which she is sure to do. The world, however, has not been permitted to know her name—her descent is as noble as your own, Westchester—but, to-night, I can only become acquainted with her by the *soubriquet* of Incognita. I do not think Lady Westchester, who has seen her, feels disposed to enter into this piece of pleasantry, and I imagine she feels less inclined to accept an introduction which comes before her in a shape not perfectly *enregle*. But those present, Westchester, who know me well, are quite ready to accept my guarantee that the birth and position of the young lady are unimpeachable, and to enjoy the riddle, for such it is—and, at most, a harmless one. Pray, Westchester, proceed yonder, where you will find Incognita, *chaperoned* by the Countess of Brackleigh. Look at her features and figure, her *tout ensemble*, and then return to me, and tell me whether you can make her out."

This Marquis was surprised at this communication. As it opened, he regarded it as a tedious bore, for he was anxious to be upon

the trail of his Marchioness, that, unobserved, he might watch her every action without appearing to do so. The mention of the name of the Countess of Brackleigh, had however, startled him, and at once invested with considerable interest that which he would, otherwise, have looked upon as a mere piece of caprice and fashionable folly on the part of his hostess.

As he hastened away in the direction in which the Countess of Newmarket had indicated, he encountered Lord Nihilalbum, who instantly laid his finger upon his arm, and exclaimed :

"Haw! Wethchethaw, I am delighted to meet with yaw. The thwangetht thircumthanthe hath oocawed. Haw—it will twittht youaw withible muthleth into—haw—the dwolletht thewew potherle!"

"Another time!" responded the Marquis, a little impatiently. "I am looking after a lady, whom, I fear, unless I am quick in my movements, I may miss!"

"Incognitaw, of coawth!" responded his lordship.

The Marquis looked at him quickly.

"Have you seen her?" he asked.

"Haw! have I not!" he replied, with a silent grin. "Evevbody ith tawking about haw. She'th a pothitive wage jutht now, and evevbody'th taken in with haw. Theaw will be thuch a wow when the twuth cometh out; the Counteth will have to twy a change of aiaw—do Mont Blanc, or the White Nile, or the Mawmon tewitoway!"

"I do not understand you!" said the Marquis, regarding him with a surprised and haughty glare of inquiry.

"You will, Wethchethaw, when I intwoduce Incognitaw to youaw notith. Attend me, if you pleathe?" returned his lordship, moving away in the same direction as that which the Marquis had been taking.

A few paces, politely elbowed through a moving mass, and they came upon a group of persons, who, well-bred as they were, were occupied in staring steadfastly at Floret, who was seated on a sociable by the side of the Countess of Brackleigh, looking whiter than marble, and evidently distressed and unhappy, although she made brave efforts to appear composed, calm, cold, and indifferent to the sensation she was creating, and the admiration she was exciting.

"Theyaw she ith!" exclaimed Lord Nihilalbum.

"Almighty heaven!" ejaculated the Marquis, as he gazed upon Floret's death-like face, and the expression of haughty scorn given to it by a slight and scarcely perceptible curl of the lip. "The very counterpart!"

"Of the Mawthioneth!" rejoined Lord Nihilalbum. "Yeth, but a meaw impothtaw. How the deyvil the got heaw ith a mithtewy. But it theemth to me that whatevaw fweakth the Counteth of Newawket may choothe to indulge in hawthelf, the hath no wight to play thuch pwactical joketh ath thith upon people



of high wank, bewath, and condition. I know the gurl well; she wath a meaw twamp at wathes when a child—haw—selling floweth, an' all that thowt of thing."

"Impossible?" ejaculated the Marquis, still regarding her with an air of eager, nay, intense interest. "She is wondrously like Lady Westchester!"

"Thath the cwy in ewawybody's mouth, and it ought to be thopped by an expothaw of the thwindle."

"Like enough to be even her own child!" muttered the Marquis, a sensation passing over his frame which could only be paralleled by that of death itself.

"Pothitively!" ejaculated Lord Nihilalbum, in an undertone, and with some earnestness. "And that ith the infewanth which will be dwawn by ewevy pawthon pwethent, and it will be thawculated with—haw—frightful wapidity in ewevy thuwcle. Don't you we-member haw, Wethchethaw?"

"I do?" ejaculated the Marquis, gutturally.

He recognized, in Incognita, the young, fainting girl whom he had seen borne swiftly from the private apartment of the Marchioness by the gipsy, Hagar Lot.

"I thowaght you mutht!" rejoined Lord Nihilalbum, pulling his moustache nervously. Then he added, abruptly: "It would be pothitively madness to pawmit this jugglewy to go on. The weputation of the Mawthioneth will be compwomithed. You ought inthantly to thtep up to haw, Wethchethaw, proclaim haw a cheat, and bid haw quit the plathe."

But the Marquis was too absorbed in reflections and remembrances to heed what fell from Nihilalbum's lips. He was once more mentally in converse with the innkeeper and the doctor of Beachborough.

"Haw—if you aw indiffewent to thaw honaw of ouaw Mouthe—haw—I am not!" abruptly and excitedly exclaimed Lord Nihilalbum.

In another instant he stood before Floret, and said, in a loud and insulting tone.

"Haw, Incognitaw—ha!—look at me—haw—look in my fathe—haw—don't youaw we-cognithe me?"

Floret looked upon him. She did, indeed, recognize him. Her sudden horror at beholding him lent a whiteness to the colorless hue on her cheek.

The Countess of Brackleigh, rose up, and in a commanding tone, said indignantly to him: "How dare you address this young lady, my friend and companion, with so insolent a manner."

"My dewaw weak lady, let it thuffice for you that I shall be wethpeaceful to youaw," returned Lord Nihilalbum, greatly fluttered. "But if youaw thegned undaw a moth impudent and outwagouth impothuaw I am not, and I do not intend to be. Why, I newaw met with thuch a cathe in the whole coawth of my exithence. I thay to you, gurl, how dare you to obtwude youawthelf in thuch a bwiliant and dithtinguithed thawcle ath thith. I thay, how dare you, a cheaf—a—"

"What!" exclaimed a clear, ringing voice, sternly—fiercely—interrupting him suddenly and decisively.

Lord Nihilalbum at the same moment found that a young and handsome man had interposed himself between him and Floret, and was glaring at him with glittering eyes.

Lord Nihilalbum paused.

He adjusted his eye glass, and looked with an air of wonderment upon the individual who had stepped between him and his intended victim.

"Repeat one fragment of the observations you have just been making," continued his opponent, speaking and trembling with intense excitement, "and though it shall be derogatory to my own dignity and to that of those in whose presence we stand, I will wrench your tongue from between your jaws, and crush it beneath my heel!"

"Haw!—what do you—haw—mean—haw?" exclaimed Nihilalbum, absolutely petrified with amazement.

"This," he returned, "that you have dared to insult a young, and, for the moment, a defenceless lady—that you have had the audacity to utter publicly a flagrant falsehood, which I as publicly flatly contradict, and will compel you as publicly to retract."

"Haw—who, pray, aw you?" inquired his Lordship, becoming gradually livid.

"Your superior in rank, as I am, I trust, in every attribute of manhood," instantly replied his antagonist, with scornful dignity. "I am Broadlands," he added, drawing swiftly a card from his pocket, and flinging it in his face: "I regret, for many and obvious reasons, that I should have been drawn into such a scene as this. I regret that I should have been compelled to take the present step, by the aspersions of a puppy, who appears to be as incapable of comprehending the usages of civilized society as he is wanting in the feelings of a gentleman, and the instincts of common manhood."

He turned to Floret, and, with a respectful deference of manner, he bowed to her, and said:

"Permit me to have the honor to attend you to your carriage. After such an outrage to your feelings, you will, I am sure, be anxious to retire."

"O Lord Victor!" gasped Floret, grateful to him beyond all power of description, as she clung to his proffered arm. Then instantly arose a low, murmuring buzz around, especially from the the younger men, and "No!" "No!" and "Shame!" escaped several lips.

A young peer, who knew Lord Victor well, stepped up to him and said, hastily:

"It is unjust to the lady that we should permit her to depart. The fellow who has insulted her cannot be for a moment suffered to remain. It would be a crowning insult to her if she were made even for an instant to feel that it would be proper for her to retire."

At this instant the Earl of Brackleigh, with a flushed face and glittering eyes, stepped up



to Victor and said, haughtily and imperiously, as he glanced fiercely at Floret:

"Stay, I have a duty to perform here. I have something to say."

"You will not, Brackleigh, dare to say it in my presence!" exclaimed the Countess, suddenly interposing between him and Floret.

"Nor in mine!" exclaimed the Marquis of Westchester, abruptly, but with a very deliberate emphasis.

He had, while Lord Nihilalbum was engaged in making his first few insulting remarks to Floret, caught sight of the Marchioness at the entrance to one of the conservatories, speaking with much earnestness to the Earl of Brackleigh, and that with a familiarity of manner, although it was the very reverse of levity, which was such as he had never before seen her exhibit to any man—even to himself.

With a countenance of waxen whiteness, with glaring eyes and a heart which beat tumultuously, he observed the Earl hastily approaching the spot where he was standing. He listened to the first observations which fell from his lips on reaching the group, of which Floret, Lord Victor, and the Countess were the centre; and the moment the Countess finished her reply, he took part in the conversation—and such a part.

The Earl gazed upon him with unequivocal surprise. He certainly had not expected to encounter the Marquis there—most assuredly not at such a moment.

Scowling malignantly at him, and for the time dead to every consideration, but one, he repeated his words slowly, and with stinging accentuation.

The Earl drew himself up, and replied, haughtily:

"Not dare? You mistake me!"

"I am Westchester!" replied the Marquis, slowly, and with contemptuous bitterness. "I do not mistake you! You are Brackleigh—a scoundrel—a liar—and a coward!"

The Earl passionately raised his hand upon the impulse of the moment, to fell him to the earth; but a nobleman caught his arm, and said, sharply, in his ear:

"Brackleigh, for Heaven's sake do not forget yourself! Remember where you are! There will be a proper time and place to settle this extraordinary matter! Be calm, whatever you do!"

By a powerful effort the Earl restrained his passion, but his voice trembled, as he said:

"My Lord Marquis of Westchester, I call upon you to retract your disgraceful and your your false assertions. I insist that you recall them!"

"Not a letter!" said the Marquis, firmly and deliberately. "Not with my dying breath! I should be false to my honor, and outrage truth, if I were!"

The Earl champed his teeth and lips together.

"You shall hear from me," he said.

"Quite soon enough for your courage, when-

ever it may occur, but never too soon for my inclination, if it were now!" responded the Marquis, as he stalked away.

During this colloquy Lord Victor, who found Floret hanging upon his arm as though she was in a fainting condition, drew her away. The Countess of Brackleigh, with one of Floret's hands in hers, walking by her side. Looks of wonder and astonishment accompanied them as they quitted the room.

The Marquis of Westchester observed the Marchioness, standing, like one bewildered, on the same spot where he had seen her speaking to the Earl of Brackleigh. He advanced toward her, but she caught sight of him as he drew near to her, and she moved hastily away, quitted the room, and disappeared before he could reach her.

He was blocked upon the staircase in his endeavor to descend it for more than half an hour, and on reaching the hall he learned, upon inquiry, that the Marchioness had departed in her carriage for home. He followed her thither.

As Lord Victor quitted the room with Floret, Lord Nihilalbum dispatched a lordly acquaintance to him. After a minute's conference with him, this acquaintance returned to Lord Nihilalbum, who addressed him nervously and eagerly:

"Well, what doth he thay?" he inquired.

"Why, aw—Nihilalbum—aw—I—aw—tawld him—aw—that he—aw—should heaw from you—aw."

"Yeth," responded his lordship, quickly; "and what did he thay to that?"

"Well—aw—he said that he should—aw—quite expect to heaw from you—aw," returned his friend; "and that—aw—if he did not—aw—he should certainly hawsewhip you wherever he met with you—aw."

"Did he?" exclaimed Lord Nihilalbum, with undisguised interest.

"Ya as," replied his friend; "and—aw—my belief is—aw—that he means, if you go out with him, to wing you."

"Hope he may!" exclaimed a voice near to them; "justly desawved, by gad!"

Lord Nihilalbum looked round, but was unable to discover the speaker; and, plunged into a state of profound reflection, he, too, departed from the brilliant scene.

## CHAPTER XLV.

Lead me to her! I'll fall before her feet  
Prostrate, implore, besiege her woman's heart,  
And with my tears force her to release me  
From the cruel oath which now seals my lips.  
She will absolve me unless, alas! it be  
Her heart is adamant.

—THE OBDURATE MOTHER.

Lord Victor, who had kept the promise which he had made to himself to be present at the reception of the Countess of Newmarket, and who was there under the name of a friend, whose card he used, quickly discovered, after Floret's arrival, that she was placed in an anomalous position.



Her exceeding beauty—he had not conceived that she would, by the aid of dress and ornament, look so dazzlingly lovely—attracted the gaze of all beholders, and her title excited a variety of remarks, which annoyed him as he listened to them. At first he kept aloof from her; but he gradually narrowed his distance, until he reached her side, at the very moment she most needed his presence, and when his arrival was peculiarly welcome to her.

He accompanied Floret and the Countess of Brackleigh to the carriage of the latter, and pressed Floret's hand as he took his farewell leave of her; she pressed his in return, and he felt his heart leap at her soft touch.

"I shall see you soon again," he whispered.

She gazed upon him with eyes which beamed with tenderness, but were suffused with tears.

"I regret so deeply," she murmured, "assenting to the arrangement which brought me here to-night. Kindness to me alone was intended—I am convinced of that—but I fear evil will be the only result. I pray you, Lord Victor, to let this unhappy event rest where it does. Do not suffer yourself to be drawn into any further complication on my account. More than enough has been already done, and my heart would break if any serious consequences to you were to attend the painful scene of to-night."

He pressed her hand warmly.

"Do not fear, Floret. Everything will go well. At first I regretted your presence at the Countess' to-night, but, on reflection, I am deeply gratified; for, after what has occurred, matters cannot rest where they are. Inquiry will provoke investigation, and justice must and shall be done to you. Good-night, dearest; look forward with bright anticipations; and, for my sake, be as hopeful and as cheerful as you can."

Floret was unable to utter a word, but she bent upon him a look of grateful, loving thankfulness, which more faithfully conveyed her appreciation of his noble behavior to her than any language could have done.

He waved his hand to her, and the carriage was whirled away.

She sank back very much saddened and dispirited, and not disposed to listen to or to utter a remark.

Nor did the Countess exhibit any desire to speak. She, too, laid her head back in the carriage, and clasped her hands together, for she knew that the hour of retribution, but also of her humiliation, was at hand.

Brackleigh Mansion was reached without silence having been broken by either; and as they entered the hall, and the servants bowed to them as they passed through, Floret shuddered, and felt a passionate desire to rush to the dressing-room and tear off her splendid attire, as if they were robes of flame which were consuming her.

To her joy, Ida was awaiting her; and she saw as she entered the room that she regarded

her with smiles of happy gratulation, as though she felt assured that she had achieved a brilliant triumph.

But she saw the smiles fade rapidly away, and an expression of pain cross her features, as a look of eager inquiry darted from her eyes.

"Not a word to me, darling," whispered Floret, as she folded her arms about her neck, and kissed her. "Not a word, until we are at home. Only hasten to help to rid me of these hateful things."

Ida, with a silent tongue and heavy heart, did as she was requested, and Floret was soon again attired in her own humble dress—what a relief it seemed to her to exchange it for the brilliant robes she had just cast off!—and she presented herself before the Countess to take her leave of her.

She found her seated still in the same chair into which she had thrown herself on her return home, the very incarnation of woe and despair.

Floret had not, in her bewildered terror and half-fainting state, when attacked by Lord Nihilalium, observed the rencontre between the Marquis of Westchester and the Earl of Brackleigh: the Countess had. She had seen with fear the ashen countenance of the Marquis, and the deadly animosity to her husband which was depicted upon it; she only too clearly interpreted its meaning—it meant death without mercy to him. She also at one glance saw that the murderous intention was fully reciprocated by the Earl. His face was flushed, and its expression was that of an anger which had been roused by a deliberate insult, but beneath it was a deeper and deadlier feeling—a long account of accumulated hate, which could only be blotted out by blood which should absorb, too, a human life.

Her scheming had brought the two men together. She was horrified at the contemplation of their final parting; she had not foreseen the probable result. In matters of revenge, women seldom, if ever, think of the consequences. She only thought that the attention of the Marquis being brought to the conduct of the Marchioness and the Earl, an investigation would take place, and justice would be done in a court of law—she had overlooked an appeal to the court of honor—nay, it would be nearest to the truth to say that she never thought at all, but acted as instinct and impulse had urged her.

It had come to this, that by the following dawn her husband—if such she might still call him—would be opposed, with deadly weapon, to the Marquis; and that the life of one or both would be sacrificed, and with either her happiness.

For what? for whom?—a woman whose heart was more impenetrable than marble, and whose virtue she believed—if apparently like snow on the surface—was as yielding to pressure as that friable, easily-dissolvable substance.

Distracted by her thoughts, she felt her



action to be paralyzed. She knew not what to do, or how to guide the storm which she herself had raised; she knew not to whom to confide her terrible previsions. To Floret she could not. She knew that by her act she had jeopardized her father's life and imperiled her mother's chastity in the eyes of that fashionable world in which she had moved as a Penelope, treating every suitor with disdain, and apparently regarding the honor of her husband as her most cherished idol.

Floret perceived the struggle which was going on in her mind, but attributed it to the conduct of the Earl to her, and the humiliating position in which it placed her. She, however, thought that it would be prudent not to advert to it; and she, therefore, in brief terms, thanked her for the interest which she had evinced in her fortunes, and regretted that the result should have proved so unsatisfactory to both; she added that, the appeals made to her mother having failed, it now became her duty to herself to act in such a manner as to compel an acknowledgment of her birth, and to establish her right to a proper position; or, failing that, to retire into insignificance, and never be seen or heard of more.

The Countess bade Subtle, in low and husky tones, to attend the two young ladies to the carriage, which, under her instructions, was waiting to convey them home, and she bade them farewell, adding, in strange, guttural accents:

"The drama is nearly played out. Heaven help us! it promises to end like an awful tragedy!"

Floret did not comprehend her meaning; but taking Ida by the hand, she bent low to the Countess, and passed out into the corridor, and so down to the hall, with a sense of having been deeply humbled, and with feelings of mortification, under which her spirit was very restive.

As they reached the hall, they were startled by a tremendous knocking at the door, which the hall-porter, with a bound, reached and flung wide open.

With a countenance pale and stern, the Earl of Brackleigh entered with a quick and haughty step, and encountered Floret.

Their eyes met.

She drew herself up; that same curl of the small, beautiful upper lip, which had been so remarkable a characteristic of Constance Plantagenet's face, gave an expression of scorn to his features, which made him start.

She passed him with a proud demeanor, and the door closed behind her ere he could utter a word, or act upon an impulse which, as he regarded her features, suddenly moved him.

"My God!" he muttered; "if, after all, Constance should have deceived me! Can such a marvelous resemblance be an accident? O! if Shelley were only living, the point upon which all this misery is turning would at least be settled."

He inquired, on reaching this apartment, for

Nat Ferret; but he was informed that a note had arrived there for him at rather a late hour, and he had gone out.

He left word to say that he had been summoned to the west, but that he would return as soon as he was able.

The Earl knew by this message that the note was from Fane, the attendant of the Marchioness of Westchester, and that probably there was some important intelligence to be brought to him. He, consequently, resolved to sit up for Nat. He had already sent a friend, a nobleman, to the Marquis of Westchester, to arrange a meeting, for that any compromise between them could be effected he knew to be impossible; it was necessary, therefore, to await his return.

He flung himself into a chair, and the form of Floret at once presented itself before him, as with wonder he had seen it at the Countess of Newmarket's, and a few minutes previously in his own hall, moving with a stately and proud mien past him.

Floret and Ida went on their way home; and to the inquiries of the latter Floret had little to respond—that little was painful to herself, and most unsatisfactory to her companion.

She passed a sleepless night; that stony stare which her mother had turned upon her haunted her, and roused her to a determination to act for herself.

She saw that the whole chain of evidence to substantiate her claim to be the legally born child of Lennox and Constance Bertram was complete; not a link was wanting; it was but to harden her heart and to set about her task.

The hardening of the heart was a more difficult process than she thought it would be—a process in which she met with very little success.

The following morning, she went round to the residence of Susan Vere, in order to see Fanny Shelley; and she learned with satisfaction, after one day's perfect quiet, and two nights' refreshing sleep, Fanny had found herself well enough to quit her bedroom, and to talk with them all quite rationally, and to bear the narration of events which Stephen first and then Susan made to her.

"She knows now who you are, dear Floret," continued Susan, with glittering eyes. "She knows that you are the child she brought to Bechborough, and who cost her her reason—no—no—I mean—who was reared there as the Poor Girl, and who once suffered so much. But she wishes so earnestly to see you, that if you had not come here so opportunely, I should have gone over to your residence, and fetched you."

Floret was overjoyed to hear this communication, and instantly accompanied Susan into a room, in which she found Fanny seated with Stephen and Harry Vere, who were conversing with her in low and gentle tones.

As Floret entered the room, the rich soft brown eyes of Fanny turned upon her; she



half rose up with a cry of wonder and joy, and re-seated herself instantly as a feeling of disappointment stole over her features.

For a moment only she covered her face with her hands, and then removing them, she rose up once more, and stood beside Floret with a demeanor of deference and respect.

"Do you know me, Fanny?" asked Floret, half timidly.

"Know you! O yes, Miss, I recognized your features instantly. Could I ever forget them?" she replied, looking fondly yet still respectfully at her.

"Whose features do mine resemble?" asked Floret, breathlessly.

"Those of your lady-mother, Miss," continued Fanny, half thoughtfully, as she perused Floret's lineaments. "Yet these words sound strangely in my ear, although they fall from my own lips. When last I beheld her, she looked scarcely older than you—as fair and beautiful, only haughtier, prouder, more scornful in her expression."

"You speak of your foster-sister!" suggested Floret, with a wild palpitation of the heart.

"I do, Miss, of my foster-sister whom I loved as I did the breath of life," she answered, pensively; "my foster-sister and your mother!"

"And her name?" pursued Floret, earnestly.

"The world then knew it as Constance Edith Plantagenet," rejoined Fanny, musingly; "but I knew it as that of the Viscountess Bertram."

"You were present at her marriage?" continued Floret, hurriedly.

"I was, Miss," returned Fanny.

"And attached your name to the register, as one of the witnesses?" followed up Floret, eagerly.

"I did, Miss," she answered, readily.

Floret, with trembling fingers, produced the paper which Liper Leper had placed in her hands, and opening it, spread it before Fanny.

She pointed to her signature.

"Is that your handwriting?" she asked, almost inaudibly.

Fanny looked at it attentively.

"It is," she replied, firmly.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Floret, with a deep sigh of relief.

"But, in Heaven's name, how came you possessed of that paper? It was in a large book that I signed my name," exclaimed Fanny, with surprise.

"You shall know all, shortly," responded Floret. "I wish first of all to establish my identity. You will aid me, will you not?"

"With my whole heart," returned Fanny, warmly.

"Do you remember my birth?" inquired Floret, with faltering accents.

"O, well—well I remember that dreadful night," she exclaimed; and pausing, placed her white, thin hand upon her brow.

They all kept a profound silence.

Presently Fanny raised her head, and fixing her eye on vacancy, said, in a half-dreamy tone:

"Her marriage was a secret one, and it soon became a dreadful one to keep, for she knew that she was about to become a mother, just as she discovered that he who had seemed to love her so dearly, so very dearly, had grown cold and indifferent to her—indifferent to her, who had such a lofty, towering spirit, who would not pass an unintended slight by me without words of passionate resentment. She formed the strange and terrible design of concealing the birth of her child. I appealed to her; I remonstrated with her; but she rebuked me with fierce and angry words. She struck me in her passion, and then went on her knees, and with her arms about my neck, she wept and sobbed wildly and hysterically. I could only be silent and obey her directions. We went at her wish to Beachborough. Her mother, the Lady Henrietta, objected, and she stamped her foot at her; her father demurred, and him she did not answer, but she frowned angrily at him, and ordered me to pack up her clothes and mine. Mr. Plantagenet and the Lady Henrietta knew of our departure only when we were more than half way there.

"And when we got to the abbey she selected the most secret, retired, and gloomy chambers to live in; and she sat close with me all day, sewing and making clothes for the little creature that was coming, and whom she hated with a bitter, unnatural hate, even before it came into the world."

Floret groaned; but she stifled as well as she could the agony she experienced, for she feared that if she interrupted Fanny in the thread of her discourse, she might be unable to rejoin the disjointed parts.

"At last the dreaded hour came," continued Fanny, still in the same low, earnest, and thoughtful tone. "It was a dreadful night, it rained very heavily, and the wind howled, and the thunder roared, and the lightning flashed in sheets of flame. I went alone for the doctor, he accompanied me back; and in his presence, that of mine, and of God, only, was the child born. The doctor placed it in my hands, I attended to its first wants, and to those of its wretched, helpless mother. It was I who shielded it in my arms when its mother refused to look upon it. I who bore it to a nurse, who nourished it. I, who, upon my knees placed it before her, when she resolved to part from it and from me forever, when she extorted from me—

"My God!"

She uttered a scream, and fell suddenly upon her knees.

"What have I done!—what have I done! O my God! pardon me. I have violated my oath to preserve this, her secret, sacredly, until she herself or death absolved me from it. Go, leave me," she cried, to Floret; "go, you have made me break my vow."

She bowed her head down upon the ground, and wept and trembled convulsively.



Stephen Vere caught her from the ground, and folded her to his heart.

"Look up, Fanny, girl," he said, in a tender, but very earnest voice; "look up, girl, thee'st done no wrong. Thee hast parted with thy love—with reason—nay, for a time thee hast parted with thy life, to keep yon creature's sad secret. Thee hast done, girl, thy duty by her nobly, bravely; but thee hast a duty, too, girl, to her who first rested in thy arms in this world, whose first pressure was not to her own mother's bosom, but to thine, thine, girl. Why, thou didst have charge of her; thou didst vow to thyself to protect her, and be a mother to her; and thou wast so when all the world fell off from thee, when even I—a coward and a dog for losing faith in thee—fell away, too, and would have tried to tear thy secret out of thy heart, even at cost o' thy life an' mine. An' thou wouldst have been a mother to her still, had I not carr'd thee off, wouldst thee not? Thou wouldst—I know it. Wilt thee desert her now, girl?"

He paused. Fanny still sobbed violently. Stephen bent over her and kissed her forehead.

"She has been all her life a poor girl, Fanny," he continued, speaking in earnest tones. "A poor girl, my lass; an' what do those words convey to thy mind? Why, struggles, an' trials, an' temptations—everything but happiness, or comfort, or peace. A poor girl; Fanny, the words go to my heart when I hear them, an' I wish that I could do what my soul yearns to do, and wealth would help me to do, there should not be a poor girl in all the world."

Fanny only sobbed more bitterly.

Stephen gazed earnestly at her, and continued:

"Why, Fanny, that young and delicate creature there, gentle born, has been bred as a poor girl—a poor, shoeless girl. She, with a mother in a palace, an' a father in a castle, has been paddlin' on the bare, cold, wet ground without a covering to her feet. She be a poor girl still. Wilt thee, girl, for the sake of maintaining a weak promise made to a hard-hearted woman, doom this?"—he raised his eyes to Floret as he spoke, and she saw that they were clouded with tears—"bright and beautiful young lady to be a poor girl to the end of her days? Wilt thee do this, Fanny, an'—an' keep my love for thee, too?"

Fanny seemed convulsed by her emotion; but she raised her head and gazed upon Floret with streaming eyes, and, sinking upon her knees at her feet, cried:

"Take me to her, to Miss Constance—the Viscountess Bertram, God knows what now—take me to her! I will pray to her—I will clasp her knees—I will not leave her until she has absolved me from my oath!"

Floret raised her from her suppliant posture, and, twining her arms about her, whispered tenderly in her ear:

"Compose yourself, dear Fauny. Calm

your feelings, and; when you are stronger and better, we will together proceed to her."

"Now," shall it be!" exclaimed Fanny, releasing herself forcibly from Floret's embrace. "Not a day—not an hour shall pass without my presenting myself before her. Susan, give me my bonnet and my shawl, I will go now!"

Before Susan could answer her, she hurried into her bedchamber, and reappeared almost immediately, dressed for the street.

"Come," she said, hurriedly, to Floret. "Come; I know the way to Plantagenet House."

"Gently, girl," interrupted Stephen, soothingly; "thee'rt exciting thyself too much."

"No, Stephen," she cried, "I am not mad now. I have a duty to perform; you have said that I have, and I will do it. Come—come!"

As she spoke, she dragged Floret rather than led her from the room.

Stephen Vere caught up his hat and slowly followed them.

#### CHAPTER XLVI:

"Gold glitters most where virtue shines no more;  
As stars from absent suns have leave to shine.  
O, what a precious pack of votaries  
Unkennel'd from the prisons, and the stews,  
Pour in, all opening in their idol's praise;  
All, ardent, eye each wafture of her hand.  
And, wide expanding their voracious jaws,  
Morsel on morsel swallow down unchew'd,  
Untasted, through mad appetite for more;  
Gorg'd to the throat, yet lean and ravenous still.  
Sagacious all, to trace the smallest game,  
And bold to seize the greatest." —Young.

The Marchioness of Westchester, after her interview with Floret, and her subsequent scene with the Marquis, in which her contending emotions had forced her into a hysterical fit, felt her position to be intolerable.

Possessed naturally of an order of mind in which obstinacy is but too frequently mistaken for firmness, she had for years, socially submitted to a species of self-annihilation for an idea.

No woman can bear to be slighted by any man with equanimity. Scornful indifference from members of her own sex she is never unprepared to receive, and she invariably regards them with a sovereign contempt; but a slight from a man is a slur upon her personal attractions and winning qualifications as a woman; and it stings her, because it wounds her pride.

She instantly hates the man who offers it; and if she can return the compliment, she will never hesitate to do it; or if she can offer remarks calculated to wound his vanity, and which she knows will reach his ears, she will assuredly give him the full benefit of them. But there it ends.

There is a difference, and a marked one, in the case where the woman loves the man who slights her. She is then not content with a mere retort. She resents. She is spiteful, vicious, pauses at nothing to be avenged, even



if when successful she weeps the bitterest tears at her own success. No rules are without exceptions, but we believe that what we here assert is only too true of the majority of the sex, and is the result of the delicate character of their organization, which renders them easily excitable, too prone to see and imagine things which have no foundation in truth, and to act upon hastily-formed conceptions, even to their own unhappy default.

This was the shoal upon which the Marquioness ran her back, which, at the outset of her life, was freighted with happiness, and wrecked it.

She was possessed not only of a keen consciousness of her beauty, both of feature and form, but of a proud sense of her descent and her position. She felt—nay, she knew, that she was in herself a prize that any man would be enraptured to secure; and she made no allowance for the fact that possession very much modifies the enthusiasm which is employed in obtaining it.

In the true, genuine spirit of a woman's love, she gave herself heart, soul, life, happiness, all that was, indeed, combined within herself, and which she had to bestow to Bertram, and without a reserve.

She believed, without a single misgiving, that to him she was what he had incessantly declared her to be—the one sole object which could make life a paradise. When, therefore, she, after their union, found him to be less profuse than he had been, not only in his expressions, but in his acts of endearment, that he did not bow with such unreserved submission to every caprice she had formed, and that he remonstrated where he had before yielded with a fond smile and without a sign of dissent, her pride took alarm.

When to these unsatisfactory symptoms he displayed apathy and listlessness in her presence, instead of that enchanted rapture which had distinguished every gesture he made to her, she at once imagined that his love had changed into indifference, nay, that he had never loved her at all. That, being older and more experienced than herself, he, having been smitten by her personal charms, had lured her into an attachment for him, and had tricked, cheated, deceived her. Nay, more, she believed that he had grown tired of her—of her!

Upon this supposition she had acted throughout until within a recent period. It had sustained her in her dreariest and saddest moments—it had fortified her when she found that the chain which fastened her to the Marquis of Westchester, and which she had herself riveted, galled her the most bitterly; and it might, nay, it would, have borne her on to the end, if incidents, which she had not foreseen, and upon which she had never calculated, had not arisen and compelled her to examine seriously into the past, struggle with the present, and reflect with dismay upon her future.

The conduct of Bertram during the last few years, his asseverations of unaltered love, and

his professions of perpetual tenderness and affection in the future, weakened her belief in the correctness of the assumption she had originally formed, and prepared the way for a new impression, which rather urged her to imagine that it was she who had changed, not he. That, under, the pressure of a tie, the concealment of which rendered it irksome to her, she became unreasonably exacting, and because he did not once respond to her exaggerated claims upon his attachment, and his already blind submission, he had, therefore, grown indifferent to her. That, in fact, it was she who had been wrong from the commencement, not he, and that she alone was to blame for all that had happened.

It may easily be conceived with what passionate regrets and self-reproaches she now looked upon the past—how she loathed the chain which confined to the Marquis—how she longed to break it asunder, and, falling in with Bertram's views, at last determined to throw off her shackles, and fly with him to some place where, in calm and peaceful retirement, they might end their days happily together.

Like most guilty persons, she made mental arrangements, when preparing to quit the scenes of her wrong-doing, by which she expected to pass the remainder of her allotted term in the undisturbed enjoyment of serene happiness,

But it is God who disposes.

Her last interviews with Floret and the Marquis decided her previously wavering mind, and she resolved to accept Bertram's proposition, and fly with him.

She saw that the discovery of the huge imposition which she had so long kept up was close at hand. The Marquis already knew much; and the investigations, which she was aware he was pursuing, would reveal to him more. Floret, too, her counterpart in form and feature, hovered and flitted about her like a spectre, and her origin it would be impossible much longer to conceal. She now distrusted Hagar Lot; and her hopes of successfully braving out the storm which had already commenced to pour its destructive fire upon her, departed with the physical strength which the energy requisite to face her difficulties would have demanded. She was overwhelmed by the threatening aspect of the circumstance which surrounded her. She was aware that actual proof rested solely on Fanny Shelley, and she believed her to be dead; but she had not the strength and firmness now to meet and defy accusations and charges supported by witnesses who could testify very nearly to the real truth, and, therefore, she came to the conclusion that she would fling aside her coronet so long falsely worn, and cling for the remainder of her life to her legitimate husband—to him whom, before the altar of God, she had sworn to love, to honor, and to obey, and to whom now only she proposed to keep sacred that vow.

It was with the intention of imparting to



him her resolution that she instructed her woman, Fane, to convey to him, through the medium of his groom, the intimation that she should be present at the Countess of Newmarket's reception.

She knew that when he received this hint he would not fail to meet her there; she was conscious that she was incurring a great risk by making this assignation with him; but, then, her situation was desperate, and desperate diseases require desperate remedies.

She, however, on the other hand, assured herself that the Marquis would not be present, and that he would entertain no suspicion in consequence of her recent illness that she would go, although she resolved to do so, whether he knew it or not—to brave and dare anything, indeed, in order to carry out her object.

Then she reasoned, too, that in such a numerous assemblage the mere circumstance of her meeting and speaking a few words to the Earl of Brackleigh would not excite notice. She had arranged in her own mind the few words that would suffice to acquaint him that she yielded to his suit; that she was ready to return to her allegiance to him, and to fly the country at any moment. She expected him to make all the necessary arrangements. A few moments' conversation, and she anticipated the whole thing would be managed.

We have seen that she was deceived in her anticipations, but she was not prevented carrying out her design. She was certainly petrified with amazement to meet Floret in such an august assembly—astonished to see her dressed in a robe exactly like her own, and glittering with diamonds which, in magnificence and value, far surpassed her own.

At the first glance, she regarded her only as a young and exquisitely lovely girl of high birth just entering life; and for the moment a feeling of pity passed through her breast that such a young and radiant creature should ever awaken to the knowledge that the paradise on the threshold of which she believed herself to be, was but a hollow sham, a mockery, a delusion, a snare.

Almost at the same moment, she became conscious that she was gazing upon the face—into the eyes of her own child—her unacknowledged, discarded, disowned child. There, too, in the very heart of the circle in which she had moved as a creature without taint.

She could not permit herself to shrink, to cower, to faint, or to utter the anathema which rose to her lips. She could only take refuge in the cold stare with which aristocracy crushes, or believes that it can crush, whatever it may please to consider presumption, and pass on.

Another moment, and blindness seemed to have fallen upon her; she tottered and sank upon a seat; she knew not in what part of the room or among what people she had fallen. She heard the buzz of voices, the shuffling of feet; she felt the heat, and was conscious of the odor of exotics. She heard words ad-

ressed to her, without recognizing their import, and then she grew conscious that it was imperative that she should make an effort, and be actually as calm and as cold as she then looked.

The first sense that she was able to control was the power of vision, and she cast her eyes nervously about her.

Not far from her, with pale face, but looking in her eyes almost as young, and certainly as handsome, if not handsomer than ever, she saw the Earl of Brackleigh.

He was leaning with an affectation of listless indolence which seemed to be natural to him turning his eyes slowly by turns upon the face of every woman within their range, but not permitting them to rest for an instant upon one.

The Marchioness bent her eyes upon his, and gazed intently upon him; and, whether there be truth or not in the assertion that sympathetic action takes place at the power of the will, as electro-biologists assert, it is at least certain that the Earl instantly turned his face round, and looked directly at her.

She made a sign, and moved toward the door of a conservatory near to her; he observed it, and strolled listlessly, and apparently without motive, in the same direction. They met; a few words of salutation passed; he bent over the magnificent bouquet which she held in her hand, and she spoke to him a few words rapidly, in a very low tone, but heard distinctly by him. She then spoke of Floret; bade him contrive to have her expelled in some humiliating form, and as she concluded, her eye caught sight of the Marquis of Westchester glaring at her from a distance.

She saw the flash of his vindictive eye, and an exclamation escaped her lips, to arrest the Earl of Brackleigh, so that he should not move in the direction in which the Marquis was standing; but it was uttered too late—the Earl had moved away.

For a minute or two, she gazed breathlessly at the Marquis as the Earl drew near to him. Her vision seemed to be sharpened; she saw with frightful distinctness the expression upon the face of the Marquis, that it meant insult, outrage, murder to the man approaching him.

By a powerful impulse, she was urged to hurry forward, and step between them; but she felt paralyzed, bound, manacled, tongue and limbs; she had neither voice nor power to move; and, even if she had, she knew that at this moment she dared not.

She could see there was a commotion. It was very slight; there was no noise, no angry gesture, no disturbance. Then the Marquis suddenly moved toward her.

She was then released from the spell which had chained her to the spot, and she moved swiftly away.

Moved still like a queen, but feeling like the veriest wretch that ever crawled upon the face of the earth.



Fortune befriended her in her escape. An opening was made in the crowd, still pouring up the staircase, for a lady who had slipped and sprained her ankle severely while ascending the stairs. She followed her closely, as she was borne down, and her carriage fortunately happened to be where it was quickly enabled to draw up, on being called; and it conveyed her rapidly home.

Ere she reached her apartments, she was met by her woman, Fane, who followed her to her chamber, and as soon as she closed the door behind her, she informed her that the Marquis had not long since followed her to the Countess of Newmarket's.

The Marchioness replied in a sharp, short, tone, that she was acquainted with the fact.

"Do you also know, my lady," added Fane, meekly, "that Captain Parrot, of the Sydney Mounted Rifles, is in my Lord's study?"

The Marchioness turned quickly to her, and ejaculated with surprise: "Where?"

Fane repeated her words, and continuing, said:

"My Lord sent for me immediately after your ladyship had departed; and while he was trying to worm out of me anything about your ladyship which he considered that he ought to know—"

"Pitiful! contemptible!" ejaculated the Marchioness, scornfully.

"One of the men-servants announced Captain Parrott," pursued Fane. "I would not leave the room, although my Lord seemed much disturbed by his arrival, until I had a good look at him, so that I should know him again; and I expect I shall very soon know where to find him if he should be wanted."

"Is he locked in the apartment?" inquired the Marchioness.

"No, my lady; but my Lord's valet is watching the door," returned Fane.

The Marchioness mused for a minute.

Fane watched her features anxiously, and then added:

"I know how to draw the valet away from the door for a few minutes, if your ladyship should wish to question Captain Parrot a little without anybody knowing it?"

"I do, Fane," returned the Marchioness, quickly.

"If your ladyship will proceed to the study, in three or four minutes from this you will find no one near the approach to it," she rejoined.

The Marchioness bent her head, and the girl glided away.

The Marchioness unlocked a drawer, and took from thence a well-filled purse, and proceeded slowly to the study of the Marquis.

Fane had kept her word; there was no sign of the Marquis's valet on her way to the room in which Captain Parrot was seated.

She opened the door noiselessly, and closed it behind her. She passed a small bolt which was under the lock into the catch, and then she turned her eyes upon Captain Parrot.

He was seated with his back toward her by a table, with his feet upon a chair; a yellow silk handkerchief was laid carefully across his knees; at his elbow was a decanter, with a small quantity of port wine in it, and in his hand was a glass filled with the "generous liquid", which he was holding up between the lamp and one eye, the other being carefully closed. He was examining the light, fleecy wing which was floating in the wine in very commendable quantity.

"I am happy to inform you!" exclaimed the Captain, addressing vacancy, not having heard the Marchioness enter, and being quite unconscious that he had an auditor, "that the wine continues of the same excellence as per last, and now, gentlemen, what shall we say? What shall we say with this good wine, bubbling, foaming, glistening, sparkling, at our lips, inviting us to swallow the pearl necklace which floats upon its edge so temptingly? Well, since you leave it to me, I will give you, for the sixth time—I like to be grateful—remember, gentlemen, this is a bumper toast, and that, when the wine is out, we can ring for more—a—whether we get it or not. I say, gentlemen, I will give you, for the sixth time, the immortal adoration of that pretty little creature, who smiled so bewitchingly upon me as I entered this chamber. Bumpers, gentlemen: May we hold in our arms those we love in our hearts. Aha! No heeltaps, you will please to observe," he added, as he emptied his glass, and then turned it with its foot uppermost. He refilled it.

"What should I have done," he continued, soliloquizing; "what should I have done, gentlemen, in this dull room, but for your pleasant company, some of this magnificent old port, and the memory of that fascinating little witch who greeted me, on my arrival here, with the smiling aspect of a beneficent fairy? Would that she were here now, and were to steal gently up to me, and whisper in my ear:

"You are Captain Parrot, of the Sydney Mounted Rifles!" exclaimed the Marchioness, in her silvery voice, but in her sternest and haughtiest tones.

The Captain turned his head sharply, and sprang to his feet.

Before him stood a beautiful and commanding woman, exquisitely dressed, and glittering with diamonds.

He had no doubt who it was who stood before him; but he had a strong misgiving respecting her object in seeking him.

He gave a sickly smile, bowed low, and asked, instead of replying:

"Pardon me, Madam; whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"For the time being, I am the Marchioness of Westchester," she replied, in the same haughty tone; "but let me, at the outset, suggest to you that I came here to question, not to be questioned. You will, therefore, be so good as to reply to the question that I have put to you."



"I am Captain Parrot, my lady," he replied, in a somewhat meek tone.

"It is not your real name," she rejoined; "let me know what that is."

He looked at her with surprise, and remained silent.

She frowned at him, and added, sternly:

"I have not time for paltering or evasion. Your object in coming here is, to obtain money—the means by which you design to extort it is, the possession of a secret. This purse is full of gold; if you can answer the few questions, honestly and truthfully, which I shall put to you, it is yours; if you refuse, it will be withdrawn, and a mode adopted to compel you to speak, which will be quite effectual, but less gratifying to you in its result. What is your real name?"

The pseudo captain still hesitated; he gazed at her with a furtive but searching look of inquiry. There was an air of desperate determination upon her face, of which he did not approve; but he asked himself, if he yielded to her pressure, what would the Marquis say and do? Where would be the value of the secret upon which he set such a price? He felt himself to be in an awkward predicament.

The Marchioness laid her hand upon the bell.

"Will you answer me?" she said, with a haughty frown. "What is your real name?"

"Matthew Warlock," he replied, quickly, fastening his eyes obliquely upon the purse.

"You were a corporal in the Second Regiment of Life Guards when the Marquis of Westchester was one of its captains?" she pursued.

He bowed.

"And was his regimental servant?" she added.

He bowed.

"And jackal!" she said, with scornful, sarcastic bitterness.

He raised his head and one hand, deprecatingly.

"You were such, and by your own confession!" she exclaimed, emphatically. "I have perused your recent letter to the Marquis."

The Captain waxed white. His back opened and shut.

"The contents of that letter are true," she subjoined.

He shrugged his shoulders. What was he to say to secure even a fraction of reward?

"You cannot deny it," she continued, as she saw he was casting about for an answer.

"Your letter was a private communication to your former master. You declared yourself to have been, at one time, the person in whom he reposed his secret confidence. You would not, in order to bring him to your terms, write to him privately a tissue of lies, which he could not fail to know would be such. I may, therefore, justly conclude that, in your communication to the Marquis, you have stated nothing short of the truth. Now, tell me the date of the marriage between Captain Wolverton and Ada Vian."

Captain Parrot appeared perfectly bewildered and confounded; but the Marchioness repeated her questions sharply, and he answered, with embarrassment:

"I—I—must consult my pocket-book."

"Consult it," she said, briefly, but sternly.

He pulled out, from an inner pocket in his military frock-coat, a well-worn pocket-book, and, opening it, fumbled over its contents.

"Quick!" she ejaculated, emphatically. "Time is precious to me."

"It was upon the 10th of February, 1831," he answered, hastily.

"Where did the ceremony take place?"

"Prince's-court Chapel, Pall Mall."

"The clergyman's name?"

"The Rev. E. K. Meanwell."

"Where is he to be found now?"

"He is the Rector of Allhallows, Barking."

"What is the name of your brother?"

"Walter Warlock."

"His address?"

"Ahem!"

"No hesitation now, man. You have proceeded too far; you cannot halt. His address?"

"No. 7 Brick court, Temple."

"The name of the friends of Ada Vian, who is the rightful Marchioness of Westchester?"

"Lady Susan Vaughan, No. 123 Eaton square."

"There is a child, you say?"

"Yes, my lady—a girl."

"Where was she placed?"

"In Yorkshire."

"What part?"

"Ugglebarnby House, Ugglebarnby, Yorkshire."

"Where?" almost screamed the Marchioness, with sudden surprise.

Warlock repeated the address.

The Marchioness turned away and paced the room.

It was the same address as that to which Hagar Lot had conveyed Floret.

They must have met, and have been partly brought up together. She bent her head. It was surely the hand of Heaven working out its own solution of the strange drama she had woven, the *dénouement* of which she had striven, and and was now striving to control.

Captain Parrot, who watched her closely, was at a loss to comprehend what had occasioned this sudden emotion, and attributed it rather to the signs of a disbelief in what he had stated. He, therefore, not only again repeated the address, but the names of the sisters Blixenfinik.

The Marchioness waved her hand impatiently, and added:

"Where is that girl now?"

"There, for aught I know, my lady," he replied. "The fact can soon be ascertained."

She drew a deep breath, and then said:

"It is a matter of no importance to me. It is sufficient for me that I am acquainted with the circumstance that there was issue to the



marriage to which we have been referring, and that it is to be produced, if required."

"Certainly, my lady," responded Captain Parrot.

The Marchioness had made notes of the information which the Captain had communicated to her, and she went once more over each item, the correctness of which he vouched. She then said:

"I have no more questions to put to you. There is the purse; you can inform the Marquis upon his return of this interview or not, as you may consider most conducive to your interests. I shall not volunteer the statement that I received this communication through you. I will merely remark, fool, that the greatest reward you can hope to expect will be paid to you by the friends of the woman who has been deserted, when, by your aid, she is restored to her position as Marchioness of Westchester."

She tossed him the purse as she concluded, and, with her usual haughty mien, departed from the room without noticing the low bow which he made to her.

He followed her to the door, and after she disappeared, opened it gently, for she had closed it behind her, looked into the room beyond, but without seeing any one. He reclosed the door, and returned to the table and opened the purse, so that the light of the lamp fell full upon its contents—there were sovereigns and notes crammed together, and his heart leaped at the sight.

He closed the purse and placed it in the very lowest depths of his breast-pocket, and then he filled up his glass with one more bumper of port.

He glanced round the room, to assure himself that he was alone, and being certain that no one was near to listen to him, he exclaimed, with seeming self-possession, although he was still in a perspiration from fright and wonder at the unexpected visit of the Marchioness:

"You will permit me to observe, gentlemen, that I think this world, taken as a whole, a very good world. It has its dark sides, but it has its bright sides. Have we not here a healthy example?" he slapped the spot where the purse reposed as he spoke; "I drink its health. I drink the health of the woman who has left me. I drink to the health of the suggestion she has given me. I drink to the health of the Lady Susan Vaughan, who is about to bestow upon me a fortune. I drink to the health of the Marquis of Westchester, who is about to lose a wife, for which he ought and will pay me. I drink to the health of the wife, who will, through me soon sit here in regal state, for which the Marquis will not pay me, but she will. I drink to the health of myself, as a devilish cunning fellow; and I drink the health of you, gentlemen, all round, no exceptions—and no heel-taps—hah!"

He smacked his lips as he concluded, and then put down the glass with a sudden dash, for the door at that moment was flung wide

open, and the Marquis entered, looking even whiter and sterner than when he departed.

He glanced fiercely round the apartment.

"Where is my valet?" he said sharply.

"I do not know, my Lord," returned Captain Parrot. "He brought to me a decanter with a little wine in it, and went away without speaking a word. I have not seen him since."

"I ordered him not to leave the adjoining apartment," exclaimed the Marquis, with a vexed air.

"I've not been out of this room," suggested Captain Parrot.

The Marquis mused for a minute or two, and then said to his visitor:

"You must leave me, Warlock, and take another opportunity of seeing me; it is wholly impossible for me to pay any attention to you now."

"But, my Lord, mine is not a common business, permit me to remind you," urged the Captain.

"I say it is," exclaimed the Marquis, quickly. "You came here to extort money—you seek to make me bribe you to keep my secret. There is nothing uncommon in that; but I am in that position that, at this moment, I care not whether you keep the reveal it. It is infinitely of more importance to me that you should go now."

He went to a drawer and took from it a small note-case. It contained a number of bank-notes, and he selected one, which he handed to the Captain, and said:

"Take that; it will more than suffice for your present wants. Return to me in a few days. I shall then be in a condition to listen to you, or be beyond the necessity of listening to you or your secret. Go!"

The Captain saw that the corner of the note had a black device, in which were several white letters, and he felt for the moment satisfied. He accepted it with a gracious air, folded it up, and placed it in his waistcoat pocket.

The Marquis rang his bell sharply, and his valet promptly appeared.

"Show this person out," he said, coldly.

"Good night, my Lord," exclaimed the Captain. The Marquis bowed stiffly, and the Captain and the valet disappeared.

"I must see her," burst from the lips of the Marquis, as the door of the room closed. "I must see her. I will. I must come to some decided, positive, and determinate arrangement with her. She shall not foil, elude, escape me. She must be mine under any name. Wife, mistress, slave—she shall be mine. I cannot endure this torture; damnation can have no pangs to equal the agonies which convulse me. She shall never be his. No—no! I'll slay him. He shall never leave the point of my weapon with life even fluttering in his heart. O woman, woman, what will you have to answer for if you repulse me as you have hitherto done?"

He took from a cabinet a key, and then passing through a suite of rooms he paused be-



fore a door, unlocked it swiftly, and entered the room to which it gave ingress.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

"See how all around them wait  
The ministers of human fate,  
And black Misfortune's train!" —GRAY.

The Marquis, without intending to do so, had opened the door without noise; the locks were in such perfect order, and the hinges so well oiled, that each performed its part without giving forth a sound.

He saw that the Marchioness had evidently just finished changing her evening dress—not, as he expected, for a wrapper, but for a walking dress.

The room appeared to be in confusion.

Fane was occupied, under the directions of the Marchioness, in clearing some cabinets of various articles, souvenirs and treasures of remembrance, bijouterie, and other such things; and an assistant maid was busily engaged in packing them in some traveling-cases. Dresses were strewn upon the floor, and there were portmanteaus and traveling-bags, dressing-cases, and other evidences of departure, in various spots, ready to be filled.

The Marquis gazed at these signs of preparation agast.

For the moment he was deprived of the power of speech, but recovering himself, he advanced to the centre of the room, and, addressing the Marchioness, exclaimed:

"What is the meaning of all this preparation?"

The Marchioness turned round hastily, and started when she beheld him. She, however, drew herself up to her full height, regarded him with a cold frown, and said:

"My Lord Marquis of Westchester, this is my private chamber. How dare you insult me by intruding here?"

"Lady Westchester—madam—woman," he cried, passionately; "you are my wife, and no place in which you may be can be sacred from me."

"Lord Westchester, I am not your wife," she returned, in the same tone. "Your unwished-for intrusion here is, therefore, an insult to me."

He started as her words, spoken emphatically, caught his ear; and he turned hastily to the two young women, who, both having caught her remark, looked upon her with surprise, and said:

"Leave the room."

"I bid you stay," responded the Marchioness. "You are my servants, and under my control. I forbid your departure, but command you to proceed with the tasks which I have set you, and complete them."

She turned to the Marquis, and said:

"I am not Lady Westchester. I never have been: you know it—I know it. I again repeat that you have no right in this chamber, and I will not permit you to remain within it for an instant. If you desire that I should listen to any remarks you may be anxious to

make to me, they must be spoken in some other part of the building—not here. Retire, I will attend you."

With such a commencement as this, the Marquis knew not what course to pursue. He saw that she was resolute, and would not pause in creating a scene if he sought to enforce his command to Fane and her companion to leave the apartment. Perhaps, after all, he thought it would be better that the struggle for supremacy, which he knew must take place between them, should be gone through in his study; he, therefore, assuming an air of haughty superiority and self-command, which he intended should serve as a reflection upon her conduct to him, said:

"You speak, Madam, like one laboring under a derangement of the intellect. If you will forget what is due to your own dignity, it becomes necessary that I, at least, should remember it. You will, therefore, please to accompany me to my study, and there, at least, I shall be certain of being secure from auditors, whose presence, under any circumstances, but those in which their services become a necessity, is an impertinence."

He stalked away as he spoke, and passed through the door by which he had entered.

He turned once to see whether the Marchioness was following him. She waved her hand with an imperious but patient gesture, and he went on.

The Marchioness said to Fane:

"Proceed with your task; fulfill my instructions to the letter. I shall not sleep beneath this roof to-night."

As she concluded, she followed the Marquis to his study.

As she passed through the darkened room, a tall figure rose up from the deep shadow of a recess, and glided after her.

The Marchioness entered the study, and saw the Marquis seated by a table, upon which his head was laid, abrooded by his arms.

She stood and contemplated him for a minute without speaking, and during her steadfast gaze he did not raise his head.

But the shadowy figure, which had fitted with soundless steps at her heels, moved, swiftly and silently, through a massive velvet curtain which had been drawn across the window.

At length the Marchioness, apparently unmoved by the emotion which the Marquis, without doubt, unaffectedly displayed, said, in a cold but distant tone.

"I am here. What have you to say to me?"

He sprang to his feet as though she had discharged a pistol in his ear.

He had expected her, but not, perhaps, so soon.

Hot tears were glistening upon his cheeks, but he dashed them violently away. It was a minute or so before he could speak in anything like a firm tone. Then he said, in a low voice:

"Madam, since we stood at the altar to-



gether, at no lengthened period after I first saw you, we have never been in that relation to each other in which a clear and frank understanding would have placed us."

"We have not!" she rejoined, with a peculiar emphasis.

"I wish to come to that understanding!" he said, pointedly:

"And I!" she answered, firmly.

"It is some relief to my heavy heart to hear you express this much!" he rejoined, quickly.

"And to your conscience!" she added, sarcastically.

"We are taught to believe that confession goes far to absolve us from our sins."

"Spare your sarcasms for the proper moment; you may need my forbearance!" he rejoined.

"As you will mine!" she retorted, promptly.

He regarded her with an inquiring look; but her face was as rigid as marble, and as pale.

"When we were married," he commenced, after a moment's pause.

"Stay!" she interrupted, abruptly. "With our past we are both acquainted—a weary, weary past it has been to me. It will be waste of time to refer to it: let it be a matter of memory—hateful memory it must be to both; but do not let us discuss it. It is unnecessary as a means of bringing us to the understanding of which you have spoken. The events of to-night—that especially which took place at the Countess of Newmarket's—will bring us to the point at once. Speak of that?"

He started back, and glared at her with a look of indignant astonishment. She stood as cold, as calm, as immovable as before.

A flush of hot blood rushed to his brow; he set his teeth, and clenched his hands together.

"You are right, Madam!" he said, trying to articulate his words clearly. "You frequently have made a boast that you have sustained beyond the possibility of impeachment the name of Westchester."

"I have done so!" she replied, firmly.

"But you have menaced me with intentions on your part to stain it with the foulest iniquity!" he rejoined, sternly.

"I did it for a purpose!" she returned, gloomily; "for willfulness, to relieve my brain of the pressure which your unworthy suspicions heaped upon it."

"But I saw you to-night at the reception of that infernal horse-racing woman, speaking in earnest tones, but with the familiarity which—which—one servant would adopt in addressing another, to that object of my detestation, my abhorrence, my fiercest hate, Lord Brackleigh!"

"You did, my Lord Marquis of Westchester, perceive me in conversation with the Earl of Brackleigh, but not with the low familiarity which your vulgar conception attributed to it, but with the earnestness and friendly communion which should subsist between husband and

wife," she replied, calmly and slowly, laying a marked emphasis upon the last three words.

He staggered back in bewildered amazement.

"I—I—do not understand you, woman," he gasped, faintly.

"You shall," she returned, coldly. "You appear to object to my conversing with the Earl of Brackleigh."

"With my whole heart, soul, will, being, I do," he cried, in frenzied tones.

She laughed shrilly, painfully, horribly.

"I am his wife," she said, in ringing tones.

A wild cry burst from his lips; he groaned, he gasped for breath.

"Wretch, you have foully dishonoured me!" he ejaculated, hoarsely.

She bent her finger warningly at him.

"Beware," she cried, sternly and indignantly, "how you attempt to breathe one word derogatory to my chastity, even in my ears. For fifteen years I have lived with the incubus of your name upon me and beneath your roof. You have never dared to lay a finger upon me, even in pleasantries. At the altar I swore to be true to my husband; I have been, as Heaven is and will be my judge!"

"I—I—am your husband," he cried, almost inarticulately, he was so convulsed with emotion.

"No," she rejoined, with vehemence: "nor have you ever been other than the emptiest mockery of that name. Listen. When Captain Wolverton you married Ada Vian—"

"It is false," he shouted; "it is a false fabrication—a lie."

"Of whose?" she retorted, quickly; of yours, or of Matthew Warlock, who was your regimental servant when you were an officer in the Second Life Guards?"

He panted for breath.

"Do not interrupt me," she said, significantly, "for, after I have alluded to your early life before we met, I have a revelation to make respecting my own."

He tottered to the table, and leaned his hands upon it to support himself. He bent his eyes upon her with an expression which made her flesh creep, but she did not betray the slightest sign that she was affected by it.

"You," she continued, "were married by the Rev. Mr. Meanwell, at Prince's Court Chapel, Pall Mall, upon the 10th of February, in the presence of Matthew and Walter Warlock, brothers. Was it not so?"

She paused; but though he glared at her with the same horrible expression, he did not answer.

"I know that it was so, and that after your marriage, a girl was born," she resumed. "You caused your wife to be placed in a lunatic asylum, your child at a school in Yorkshire; and you subsequently honored me with the offer of your foully-stained hand and your tarnished coronet. You offered both to me, in the belief that being as young, I was as pure and as innocent as the poor creature whom you had married and separated from under



circumstances of the most brutal iniquity. You were deceived. I was then both a wife and a mother!"

A hoarse screech burst from the lips of the Marquis. He tried to raise himself to his full height, as though he would spring at and strangle her; but his limbs appeared to be paralyzed, and although he tried to advance toward her, he only tottered a few steps, and then clung to a bookcase for support.

The Marchioness stood immovable. She gazed upon him steadfastly and firmly, and not for an instant did she exhibit the slightest sign of giving ground when he approached her with so demoniacal an expression upon his face.

As soon as she perceived that he advanced no nearer to her, but clung to the bookcase, swaying slightly to and fro like a drunken man, she proceeded with her revelation.

"You, Lord Westchester, were married upon the 10th of February, 1831; I was married at Brighton, on the 5th of December, 1832. Your child was born in the November of that year; mine in the September following. You will therefore perceive that you attempted to cheat me, and that I have successfully deceived you. I have already told you that I knew your object in selecting me as your marchioness, and I have acquainted you with mine in accepting you before the world as my husband. You desired to possess a woman whose form and face, allied to distinguished birth, might make you the envy of your peers. You obtained—a statue. I took you on the pretence of an ambition for a coronet, but for the purposes of revenge—a revenge which has recoiled upon myself, inasmuch that I have suffered long and deeply in consequence of my own mad folly. It is quite needless for me to enter upon the particulars of my clandestine marriage, why I parted—the separation was by mutual consent—from my husband, why I discarded my child. They are matters which do not, cannot interest you, nor affect you as they do me. Let this suffice. The ceremony which has passed between us, and which, in the eye of the world, made me your wife, does not, for my share in it, render me amenable to the law; at least, at your charge. You are equally free from any danger of a similar kind at my hands. You have but to look upon the past as I shall—as one of humiliating and bitter memory—and to place in your household she who is legitimately entitled to preside here as its mistress. That is the smallest justice you can render for the sin of which you have been guilty. For myself, my journey with you through life ends with this 'clear and frank understanding'. To-night, I became acquainted with the full particulars of your former marriage—to-night, I quit your roof, and forever. I have only to add that as I, when I pass into the fresh air from the heated atmosphere of this abode, shall forget you, I hope that the memory of me in your mind will die with my departure from you."

She was about to turn and quit the room,

but he motioned her to stop. She did so, and with a desperate struggle he forced out a few words.

"It is but just," he gasped, "that you should listen to me, after the patient hearing that I have given to you. I confess that I am overwhelmed by your communication, that I find it difficult not only to speak but to think with coherency."

He paused for a moment, and then, with a renewed effort, which was more successful than the last, he resumed:

"I own I am taken by surprise; but after the first horror has in some degree subsided, I seem to feel that this mutual explanation is for the best. After what you have acknowledged, I will confess that I have been married, and that I believe that the person whom I married is yet living; but I was married by a trick—by a piece of jugglery which was unknown to me; and I married you, at least, in good faith. However, that has all ended—is over; the suspicions, agonies, miseries of years, have ended with your confession. Before I received the letter of the villain, Warlock, your revelation would have slain me; as it is, it gives me hopes for the future; but ere I explain what those hopes are, let me make a few remarks upon the situation, not only in which you and I are placed, but which also compromises the position of others. For the sake of the innocent, it is proper that we should proceed cautiously. By the innocent, I mean, firstly, the Countess of Brackleigh. She surely was unmarried when the Earl sought her hand and led her to the altar?"

The Marchioness dropped her eyes upon the ground. It flashed across her mind that, but for her arrangement with Bertram, this lady would not have been so shamefully deceived—would not have been dragged into the position of wife and no wife.

"I—I—believe so," she presently faltered.

"In that case, unquestionably, Brackleigh has committed bigamy," he mused, rather than suggested.

"He—he is at least safe from your attack—or mine," observed the Marchioness, with a furtive glance at him.

"But not from that of the Countess!" returned the Marquis, quickly; "and I shall at least have the power of enlightening her upon her painful and degrading position," he added, quickly, "unless—"

He paused.

"Unless what?" inquired the Marchioness, with a questioning look.

He threw himself upon his knees with a sudden passion at her feet.

"Unless you save me from despair, madness, crime, perdition," he cried, with a frantic manner. "I love you. I have loved you passionately since first we wedded. I have borne my passion in secret. I have suffered it to prey upon my heart, my soul, rather than pain you with it; but the time has come when silence would be idiocy. I love you, and I am determined that you shall be mine. We



have both erred. We have not a fault to fling at each other without a fear of retort. We, therefore, must sympathize at least in that. Why not in every other feeling? No man of whose homage you might have the most exaggerated expectations could worship you so fondly or so devotedly as I will, if you will accept my love. No slave shall so serve you, no devotee shall so adore you as I will, if you will only receive me—I am so in the eyes of the world—as your husband. I do not ask of you, I do not expect from you, love; but you can accept mine, and return me gentleness and kindness; it will be all I shall ever hope for, all I shall ever ask of you. We will fly from this to sunnier lands. We shall still be in the eyes of the world what we have been; but we shall, in our own, be bound a closer and holier tie. Do not spurn me from you, do not discard me. Do not, I entreat, I implore you—

"Rise, Westchester, I command you!" exclaimed the Marchioness, in a loud, indignant voice, as she drew her robe, which, in his excitement, he had clutched, from his hands. "You insult me, you outrage me."

He sprang to his feet.

"Insult—outrage you!" he ejaculated, as much with fury as amazement.

"Yes," she rejoined, sternly. "You forget that I am a married woman, and not your wife."

He staggered back.

"Your effrontery has no parallel," he exclaimed, and added, quickly: "I again warn you—nay, I entreat you, not to reject me; if you do I will not answer for the consequences. Reflect—shame will have been heaped upon my name, and wherefore should I pause at any crime? My own life, without you, I shall not hold as of the value of a minute's purchase, and if I am to be hurled to perdition, do you imagine that I will not drag others down in my fall, too? Do you think you will escape me—do you think he will escape me? No! I swear that if my hopes, and desires, and wishes are to be shattered, I will crush those of all who have in any way aided to destroy mine."

She recoiled from him.

"Your answer!" he said, between his closed teeth—"your answer! Remember, you, too, have a child. Ah! I beheld her to-night. Reject me, and I'll reach your heart through her. I will—"

The room-door at this moment suddenly opened, with the preliminary of a short knock.

A servant entered, he bore a letter and a card upon a silver salver.

The Marquis motioned him, impatiently, away, but the servant said:

"I beg your pardon, my Lord. General Alderton is the bearer of this note; he says that it is from the Earl of Brackleigh, and that he must see your lordship personally, in order that he may take back to the Earl of Brackleigh your lordship's answer."

"Ah!" cried the Marquis, with a strange

glee. "I know—I know. I remember. Bid the General be seated, and say that I will be with him in a few minutes."

The man retired. He tore open the letter, and read it through.

Its contents were a cold, formal challenge from the Earl of Brackleigh, in consequence of the epithets he had addressed to him when they met at the Countess of Newmarket's. No apology was asked for.

When the Marquis had finished its perusal, he turned his eyes toward the spot on which the Marchioness, a minute or so before, had been standing, but she was no longer there; but in her place stood Hagar Lot, the gipsy.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

"Have I then liv'd to this? to this confusion?

My foe, the man on earth my soul most loathes,  
Rejoices over me; and she—even she  
Hath join'd his triumph! Off, away, begone,  
Love manhood reason—come, ye sister Furies,  
Daughters of Hate and Hell! Arise! inflame  
My murderous purpose! pour into my veins  
Your gall, your scorpion fellness, your keen horrors  
That sting to madness; till my burning vengeance  
Hath her full draught of blood."

—DAVID MALLETT.

The Marquis was startled, and it might be for the moment alarmed, when he beheld his passage to the door barred by the tall, dusky figure of a gipsy woman, whose eyes were flashing upon him with an unearthly gleam, and whose aspect was that of a desperate lunatic.

He shrunk back toward the bell with the evident intention of summoning assistance; but anticipating his intention, and perceiving its cause, she said, in a hollow, yet somewhat plaintive voice:

"Remain where you are, my Lord. You need not fear me. Whatever may be the dark and malign promptings of my spirit against the welfare of others, I have no motive, as I have no cause, to injure you."

"What do you want with me?" he exclaimed, still regarding her with suspicion.

"Do you not recognize me?" she asked.

"I do," he replied. "I do, as one of the—the—secret agents of the woman who has just left me."

"I have been such; but I am no longer her servant, for her hour has come as well as mine," responded Hagar.

"What do you mean?" inquired the Marquis, quickly.

"The clouds which obscured the setting of my star are fast gathering over, and blotting out the light of hers—"

"This is the jargon of your class. I do not desire to hear any of it. I have not time to listen to it," interposed the Marquis, incautiously. "At once communicate whatever you may wish to make known to me, or I shall ring the bell, and order you to be removed."

Hagar drew herself up, and her eyes flashed fire. She was about to reply with words of haughty indignation; but a memory appeared to cross her, and she restrained her ire, and



spoke with a manner more humble than she had yet done.

"I do not marvel at your contempt of my people," she said, with downcast eyes. "People of education spurn the notion that we are gifted with powers of inspiration. They accord them to orators and poets, and those said to be endowed with genius; but they refuse to believe that a race which has no likeness among the tribes upon the earth should speak under influences which are independent of them. They listen to them, marvel at the things they reveal and predict, affect to disbelieve them, and yet credit them still. I do not resent your contempt, it is the natural prejudice of your class; but I request you to heed what I shall say, and to give it credence; it affects your honor, and it will cut to the core of your unhappiness."

"Be quick, then, for I am importantly engaged," urged the Marquis.

"I know it," replied Hagar. "I have overheard every sentence which has passed between you and that woman of the heart of ice and the will of ice who has just departed. I know that below there is one awaiting you to arrange the terms of a mortal strife; and it is because I have heard her purpose from her lips, and because that I know your doom, that I am here to speak with you."

"My doom, woman?" he repeated, with a slight start.

"Ay," she replied, "it is at hand! You are surrounded with the omens of death. They threaten you at every turn. I cannot discover the means by which you will fall; but I know that, by accident or design, you will shortly perish."

"Impostor, you have been hounded on by the creature yonder to utter this balderdash to me with some infamous object," cried the Marquis, hastily.

"What does the note still in your hand portend?" responded Hagar, sternly. "You are no coward—you will go out with the Earl of Brackleigh. Will he treat you tenderly, think you? May not his bullet carry with it the purchase of a life? Yours is not a charmed one. Do you believe that even if you conduct your mortal strife with the Earl with swords instead of pistols, that the point of his rapier cannot reach you? Look on this paper, observe the handwriting, closely and carefully."

She handed to him a small packet, upon which were traced, with a pen, some small, neat characters.

"It is the handwriting of the Marchioness!" he exclaimed.

"Read it!" she said, laconically and emphatically.

He read aloud:

"Three grains of the inclosed powder, dissolved into any warm liquid, and administered, will produce certain death on the seventh, fourteenth, or twenty-first day."

He looked up into Hagar's eyes with a face as pale as that of a livid corpse.

"The meaning of this?" he asked, hoarsely.

"It is the property of the Marchioness," returned Hagar. "She carries some of that powder constantly with her, concealed in a gold locket, which she wears attached to one of the chains which encircle her neck. Hitherto, she has refrained from using it, because she has seen a way to escape from your thralldom, and to the passing of the remainder of her days with the Earl of Brackleigh in loving dalliance."

"Never!" gasped the Marquis, with an expression of deadly malignity upon his face.

"Thus far she has escaped from all your toils and efforts to retain her in captivity, and the Earl will escape, too, your sword and your bullet. It is written that he shall not fall by your hand. You may strive to your utmost to slay him, but his life cannot be reached by your hand."

"You cannot know this!" exclaimed the Earl, articulating with difficulty.

"Who should know it so well as I—I, my Lord?" she returned, speaking with strong feeling. "I, whom he seduced, ruined, destroyed—"

"You?" ejaculated the Marquis, gazing upon her with wonder.

"Even I, my Lord," she responded, with a bitter sigh. "I have not been always what I am. Let it go, I am now what he has made me; and though he may be and is fated to escape from a deadly blow from your hand, he will bear a charmed life indeed if he evades the toils which I shall set around him. But it is not impossible that he may do so."

She paused a moment, then added quickly:

"It was I who stole the child whom your wife bore to the Earl of Brackleigh. I it was who, at her request, consigned it to a life of dire poverty, wretchedness, and, it might have been, of shame, but that the girl's nature was foreign, not only to her position, but to vice. I it was, my Lord, who provided that poison which you hold in your hand for the Marchioness, when, discovering that her feelings for the Earl of Brackleigh had returned into the old channel in which her first love had gushed with such volume, and had leaped and bubbled so tumultuously and so joyously, she began to see that she was chained to a life of which it would be very convenient to free herself."

The Marquis clenched his hands, and gnashed his teeth together.

"I, my Lord," continued Hagar, with a bitter sarcasm in her tone, "have witnessed in the gardens of this mansion the fond endearments which have passed the Marchioness and the Earl while the world believed, and still believes, that most shameless woman to be your wife. What more would you have me say to you? My Lord, the Earl will escape you—though, I trust, not me. Will you let the woman pass from you as scathless and uninjured as though she had never wronged you? Will you permit her to lavish the caresses which should have been yours, upon another? My Lord, I leave the poison intended for you



with you. I take my farewell of you forever. The night is dark, the stars of both are obscured. I oscillate upon the verge of the boundary of eternity. Your shadow already rests upon your grave. Will you sink into it unrevenged?"

As she uttered the last words, she folded her cloak about her face, and glided swiftly and silently out of the room.

The Marquis, overpowered by the passions which Hagar had so artfully raised, sank upon a chair without attempting to arrest her departure, a prey to the most terrible thoughts.

He was aroused by the re-appearance of his servant, who informed him that the officer who waited his pleasure in another apartment was growing impatient, and requested the favor of an immediate interview, as he had other pressing engagements.

The Marquis rose up, and bade the servant lead the way. He passed his handkerchief over his face, ran his fingers through his hair, composed his features, and made a determined effort to look calm and composed.

He entered the room in which the friend of the Earl of Brackleigh was awaiting him, with a firm and haughty step, and bowed frigidly in return to the low bow with which the Major favored him.

"The Lord Marquis of Westchester, I presume," said the Major.

The Marquis bent his head assentingly.

"I am Major Alderton, of the Thirty-third, the Duke's Own," he added.

Again the Marquis bowed.

"I am the bearer of a note to your Lordship from the Earl of Brackleigh, upon an unpleasant affair," he continued. "An affair which, I hope, will have a different solution to the one that threatens."

"It will not!" returned the Marquis, coldly and bitterly. "I have nothing to retract! The fellow is a scoundrel and a villain of the blackest dye! I would not go out with him, but that I know that his descent entitles him to that privilege. You may, therefore, spare yourself all trouble and loss of time in any endeavor you may wish to make to effect a compromise. But that I met him in such an assembly as that which was gathered at the Countess of Newmarket's, I would have rendered the insult such that the suspicion of a compromise could never have been entertained by him, you, or any other person breathing."

"Enough, my Lord!" exclaimed the Major, rising. "There will only be the preliminaries to arrange. You will honor me with the name of your friend."

"General Esmond, of 119 Park lane," returned the Marquis. "I will write him a note, and dispatch it at once. You had better wait upon him in about an hour."

The Major bowed.

"Good evening, my Lord," he said. "I have no doubt but the General and I shall arrange everything to the satisfaction of both of you. He is an Irishman, and fully understands these little things."

"I have only one more observation to make," added the Marquis. "I am the challenged party, and I shall select swords as the weapons with which the issue must be tried."

"That may raise a little difficulty," suggested the Major.

"I am firm on that point," returned the Marquis.

"Well, I dare say we shall arrange it," responded the Major. "I know the Earl to be a finished swordsman—only it smacks a little of vindictiveness. Good night, my Lord."

He departed. The Marquis hurried back to his room, and sat down and indited a note to General Esmond, a friend of many years' standing. The contents were brief, but emphatic. They stated that the Earl of Brackleigh had indicted upon the writer an irreparable injury, and in retaliation he had in public taken the opportunity to deeply insult him. The result had been as he had hoped, as well as he had anticipated—a challenge.

He concluded his note thus:

"I leave the arrangements entirely to you, except in this one particular. I choose swords. As the challenged, I have a right to name the weapons—I will not waive that right."

This not be dispatched by a reliable servant, with orders to proceed to the residence of General Esmond, to take no rebuff from his people on account of the lateness of the hour, but to see him under any circumstances, and place the note in his hands only.

As soon as the servant had disappeared, he sat down, and leaning his elbows upon the table, he laid his burning forehead in the feverish palms of his hands, and reflected on Hagar's communication to him. He did not detect her devilish artifice; he thought only of her assertions, that the Earl of Brackleigh would not fall by his hand, that his own hour was come, and that the Marchioness would escape, to bestow upon another the love that he coveted.

"This woman may have spoken the truth," he soliloquized. "She belongs to a singular race, who, in spite of the scorn and ridicule cast upon them, seem to possess some remarkable power of reading the future. She has spoken to me so nearly to the truth that she may have been inspired to speak the actual truth. If I am to fall, shall that woman escape? No. What now are consequences to me? My hour is named, and I will not quit life without having exacted some atonement for the pangs she has so heartlessly caused me to suffer."

His face assumed a terrible expression, as proceeding to a cabinet he drew forth a small square box, which he unlocked. It contained some glass vessels of various sizes, and belonged to a medicine-chest which stood in another part of the room. It contained also a spirit-lamp, which he kindled, and over the flame he held a cup, in which he poured some distilled water.

As soon as he had made the latter hot, he poured some of it into a small glass, and into



this he dropped a pinch of the brown powder which was in the packet that bore without it the handwriting of the Marchioness.

He watched it eagerly as it turned the water to the hue of milk, curdled, rolled, twisted into various forms, as though it were an essential-oil. Then it gradually subsided, and became still, leaving the water as clear as it was at first.

He selected from the vessels in the square box a very small, narrow phial, and this he filled with the poison, corked it, and placed it in his waistcoat-pocket. He then carefully returned the articles he had used to their respective places, and, after a minute's reflection, during which brief space of time he underwent a severe mental struggle, he proceeded once more to the chamber of the Marchioness.

He found the door locked, and the key removed; but he possessed a master-key, and, opening the door, walked into the centre of the room.

The Marchioness gazed at him with surprise and indignation.

"My Lord," she exclaimed, with a frown, "this is beneath your dignity; it is contemptible!"

"Stay," he exclaimed; "spare your insults. An event has occurred which renders it necessary that I should say a few more words to you. I appear here myself, because it is essential that I should meet with no refusal."

The Marchioness did not reply. She mused, she wondered what more he could have to say to her.

"You are deeply interested in the matter I have to communicate!" he added, with some emphasis. "I do not desire to reveal it to you here, but will speak to you in my study, from which you can depart at will."

Still she hesitated. There was a strangeness in the circumstance and in his manner which she did not like.

"The communication I have to make will bear some reference to a note which has just reached me from the Earl of Brackleigh," he subjoined. "Refuse to comply with my request, and I will not permit you to quit this mansion—or, if you escape me, I'll hunt you and haunt you so long as you shall live."

She glanced at him; a malignant scowl passed over her features, so slight that it was scarcely perceptible—indeed, it seemed but a slight contraction of the brows.

"I will follow you once more, my Lord," she said, as if suddenly making up her mind; "but it will be for the last time."

He bowed, and answered, in a low, impressive tone: "It shall be for the last time."

He turned and quitted the room. He hastened back to his study. Upon a sideboard stood a decanter, containing sherry, with several glasses. He placed the decanter upon the table, and, by its side, three or four glasses.

Into one of these he emptied the contents of the phial.

He had hardly secreted the little phial again when the Marchioness entered.

She gazed around her with a slightly suspicious air; but the room appeared to wear the same aspect as before, and the Marquis, with folded arms, was standing in an attitude of abstraction, apparently unaware of her presence.

He, however, raised his eyes almost immediately afterward, and offered her a chair: She declined it.

"You took the opportunity, Madam," he said, in a frigid tone, "to quit this room abruptly, when a servant entered, bearing a letter addressed to me."

"I did," she returned.

"May I ask if you heard the words which he uttered?" he inquired.

"I did not," she replied, a little restively. "I thought the opportunity favorable for the termination of an interview which was extremely irksome to me, and already protracted to an unnecessary length."

"You have resolved not to consider the petition—humiliating as the word is, I will still adopt it—which I have presented to you," he said, in a tone which betrayed irrepressible emotion.

"I have," she rejoined, briefly and coldly.

He made one more passionate appeal to her to remain with him, in which, in spite of his struggles to prevent them, burning tears chased each other down his cheeks.

She listened to him in silence; but when he had ceased, she gazed at him scornfully, and said:

"I scarcely imagined that to your other weaknesses you would add silly childishness. Let it once for all satisfy you that I hate you, and that my decision is therefore irrevocable."

He turned from her, convulsed by a storm of passion. It was with difficulty that he could restrain himself from springing upon her and strangling her.

By a mighty effort he mastered his raging feelings, and after one or two turns up and down the room, he paused before her, and said slowly, and with emphasis:

"So, then, all between us has ended for ever, and events, however desperate, must take their course. I shall not permit them to glide smoothly along; that you will perhaps know hereafter. I will not detain you longer than to tell you that the note which the servant brought to me is one from your paramour—"

"My husband, Sir," interposed the Marchioness haughtily.

"Your pander, woman," he hissed between his teeth. "Your mean, truckling wretch, who loved you dearly and honorably enough to permit you to proceed to the arms of another, with his full, free consent."

She groaned and staggered back. This was a view of Bertram's conduct which she had overlooked; it struck her with strange and terrible force now.

The Marquis waved his hand contemptuously.



"No matter," he added, "let that go—you are a pair well fitted for each other. Nevertheless, this fellow has challenged me. I shall go out with him at dawn, and I shall either fall by his hand, or he will by mine. We cannot both live: I have made myself master of fence, and I think he cannot escape my deadly thrust. If I reach his heart, and I shall, woman, I will hiss your name in his ear. I will call upon him to curse you as the author of all this mischief and misery. I will seek your child out, and tell her that you have slain her father, your own honor, and hers—"

"This must not be—this duel must not take place," cried the Marchioness, wildly. "Great God, it will be murder!"

"It shall be murder!" cried the Marquis excitedly. "For he shall not leave the field alive, if I shoot him down when he is unprepared—"

"No, no!" she gasped.

"I have sworn it," he cried furiously, "and I will do it. Wretch, you will be his murderer, as you will be mine, and that of your helpless child, whose only shame—but bitter shame is that she is your daughter—"

"Peace! You slay me with your words," she gasped.

"No," he cried, frantically. "You have had no mercy on others. What mercy should be shewn to you? No, you have braved it well, and long, but my turn has come. Why, I will tell your husband, woman—you are fond of that word—how often you have caressed me, fondled, toyed with me—"

"Liar!" she shrieked, madly.

"What matters it if I am so in fact?" he responded, rapidly foaming at the mouth in his excitement. "I will swear to its truth; the world will believe me. You will have only your unsupported denial to place against my oath. Why, will not he remember how you showered your tender endearments upon him; ay, and when I avow upon oath that you have sated me with the like voluptuous dalliance, he will believe me, not you. Men always believe such stories of women, whether they are true or not.

"I will hear no more," she shrieked frenziedly, and tottered toward the door, but fell, ere she reached it, upon the floor in a swoon.

The Marquis, who had followed her quickly, caught her almost as she fell, and partly raised her up.

He gently drew her toward the table, so that the light shone upon her white features.

Her eyes were but little more than half closed, her lips were slightly apart, and in his eyes she looked more beautiful than when in full healthful life. There was no longer the scornful cast upon her lip, the indignant flash in her eye, but instead, a sad, pained, heart-broken expression.

Perhaps she seemed more beautiful than ever to him, because he was about to lose her for ever. He bent over her, and suddenly he pressed his lips to hers with one, long, passionate kiss; then he kissed her cheek, her eyelids,

her forehead, and pressed her convulsively to his breast, and so released her.

He groaned and muttered.

"It is the last childish weakness of which I shall be guilty. Be this the proof."

He laid her tenderly upon a couch, and proceeding to the table, he took up the glass which contained the solution of the *drei* which he had received from Hagar Lot. He filled up the glass with water, and murmuring—

"Surrender her to him! Never, though the scaffold be my portion."

His hand trembled, yet he did not spill a drop. He stationed himself by her side, and stood there motionless, until he saw her begin to revive, then he watched her closely and anxiously.

He saw her eyelids flutter, and her bosom heave. She raised herself partly, and pressed her hand upon her throat.

"Water, water!" she murmured, hoarsely.

He handed her the glass. She seized it, and with avidity drained it to the last drop. He took the glass from her and dashed it upon the ground, so that it shivered into a thousand fragments.

At this moment the door opened gently, and the face of Fane peered within. There was an expression of alarm upon her face.

The Marquis beckoned her, and as she approached, he said;

"Your mistress has fainted, woman; attend to her!"

He turned to the Marchioness, who had become partly conscious of her position, and said:

"Go! Now, and unto all eternity, farewell!"

She drew herself up, and turned upon him a face ghastlier than that of a spectre, her bosom heaved and fell, an expression of unalterable scorn passed over her features, and she turned from him without uttering a word.

He watched her as she awayed, rather than walked, refusing the assistance of Fane from the room, even unto the closing of the door.

Then he pressed both clenched fists upon his breast, and sank upon the couch on which—he had poisoned her!

How long he cowered there in a kind of dreamy distraction, he knew not. He was aroused by the arrival of General Esmond, who came to inform him that the preliminaries were all arranged.

"I have got everything my own way, Westchester," said the latter, in a kind of gleeful tone, which the occasion by no means warranted. "Ah, now! the whole thing will be beautifully managed. That fellow, the Major, wanted to interpose a lot of red-dikulous stepulations. Murder! I soon brought the fellow to his senses. You wanted to fight with swords, didn't ye?"

"It was a *sine qua non* with me," returned the Marquis, in a faint, but which he tried to make a firm, tone.

"Well, then, it's with swords the fight is to



be anyhow!" he replied with a laugh. "Soords is it?" sez the major. 'The devil another wipon else,' sez I. Then he hummed an' ha'ad. 'Is it fightin' you mane?' sez I. 'It is,' sez he. 'Then what the devil does it matter what you fight with, so that you do fight?' sez I. 'Where shall we get the soords,' sez he, 'at this late hour?' 'The devil cares,' sez I. 'We'll get them, though, if we fight with dragoon sabres. Lave that to me,' sez I. 'The Marquis has an arm-chist full av 'em,' sez I, 'an' ye shall take your choice from a toasting-apit to a naadle,' sez I."

"I have the swords ready for instant use," exclaimed the Marquis. "Where do we meet? and at what hour?"

"Well," returned the General, "there's a nate little bit of level land out on the north road, near a place called Willesden. I'll drive you there in my dog-cart. The major knows the spot well. The hour is six, and it promises to be a foine day. I will take you up at the corner of Park lane here just beyant, at five o'clock. It is two o'clock now, therefore you won't have too much time for the little bit of writing, and a small taste o' sleep that ye'll want. Good night, Westchester! Remember five, and don't forget the soords. I shall take a doother with us, who is an Irishman, a soldier, and a gentleman. Good-night, my boy; and by the grandfather of Moses, don't forget the soords!"

The General hurried away, and the Marquis was once more left alone.

He looked at his watch. It was half-past two. He had not much time left.

He sat down at his desk, and drew out some writing material, and then prepared a codicil to his will. In this he revoked all other wills which he had made. He devised the whole of his personal property, and all such other property which he had the power to bequeath, to be equally divided between his wife, whose maiden name was Ada Visan, and to his and her daughter, to be theirs solely and absolutely, with full power to dispose of their respective shares hereafter, in any manner they might think proper.

As soon as he had finished it, he rang his bell, and his valet appeared.

"Have all the servants retired to bed?" he asked.

"Not all, my Lord," he replied. "The porter is still sitting up for some one or two who are out, and there is one of my lady's maids waiting up."

"Send her to me," he said, hastily; "and be as quick as you can."

The valet disappeared, and very soon returned, bringing a young woman with him.

The Marquis looked at her. It was the girl whom he had seen in the Marchioness's room, assisting Fane.

"Has your mistress retired to rest?" he asked, sternly.

"My Lady has gone away in the carriage, may it please you, my Lord. Fane has gone with my Lady."

"Do you know where?" he asked.

"No, my Lord," she replied.

He bit his lip. Then he pointed to the codicil which he had recently written.

"Be good enough to take particular notice that I sign this document," he said, in a tone which was somewhat indistinct.

The valet and the girl exchanged looks of surprise, but they drew up to the table.

He took up a pen and signed it.

When he had done so, he said, in a peculiar solemn voice:

"This is my last will and testament."

Then he pointed to a vacant space at the bottom of the paper, above which he had written the usual formula of attestation, and he bade them sign their names.

They both obeyed him in silence, in wonder, and with trembling hands. Then he dismissed them without farther remark.

He folded up the paper, sealed it, and addressed it to his solicitor.

Then he wrote a letter to his wife, Ada. It was somewhat lengthy, but it pleaded for forgiveness, and begged her to think tenderly of his sins he was no more. He added a few words to his daughter, and that cost him almost his greatest effort.

But he mastered his task, sealed, addressed the letter, and laid it upon his table as if for delivery.

Then he went to the drawer which contained the swords. He drew them from their cases and examined them. They did not appear to have a flaw, and with a grim smile he restored them to their scabbards.

Then he examined his watch. It wanted still an hour and a half to the time of meeting, and he flung himself into a chair to ruminate.

But he sprang suddenly to his feet; for he fancied he saw his room-door open, and the Marchioness, dressed in grave ceremonies, enter his apartment, stalking slowly like a spectre.

It was but the mockery of a dream, and he paced the room. He resolved to doze no more. He shuddered as he reflected upon the crime he had committed, and felt that he should welcome death, however soon it might overtake him.

At last the time arrived for him to depart, and enveloped in a cloak, beneath which he carried the swords, he descended the servants' staircase, and quietly let himself out of the house by a private door.

He hurried to the rendezvous, and found the General just drawing up a light trap to the curb-stone.

Not a word was interchanged between them.

He leaped lightly into the dog-cart by the side of the General. At the back of the vehicle a gentleman was seated, muffled up in a rough woollen wrapper.

The Marquis, in a passing thought, supposed him to be the Doctor, but he did not salute him nor offer any remark.

The moment he was seated, the General



touched his horse with the whip, and as it was a thoroughbred animal, it sprang forward, and proceeded to convey them to their destination at a rapid rate.

### CHAPTER XLIX.

"Wonder on wonder rises every moment."

—SHAKESPEARE.

There was a strange wildness in the eye of Fanny Shelley when, on leaving the humble residence in Little Elizabeth street, she turned and gazed on Floret's face, and exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper:

"Come quickly, child, come—come!"

Floret was fearful that she was about to suffer a relapse, and suggested to Stephen, in an undertone, that he should hasten and fetch the Doctor. But he shook his head, and answered in a subdued voice:

"She be in the hands of God, Miss. Let her have her own way. He will conduct her to the right end, I feel sure o' that!"

Floret made no reply, but followed Fanny, though with difficulty, for she moved so rapidly.

Yet there was method in her movements. Her step was quick, but she threaded her way among the people with ease, and pressed with determination on to one point.

Every now and then she turned to ascertain whether Floret was near to her, and the latter could see that her lips were moving rapidly, though no sound came from them. Yet she saw also that her eye was more settled in its expression, though still supernaturally bright.

Satisfied that she was still accompanying her, Fanny pressed on until she had reached a large, old-fashioned mansion, contiguous to Hyde Park; and for a moment, and only a moment, she paused before it, and placed her hand to her temples, as if to collect her thoughts. Then she turned to Stephen, and said to him, with a decisive manner:

"You must wait my return here, Stephen, for I shall come back alone. Come, Miss Constance, for that is your true name, that by which you were christened in my presence—come. She will not deny you before me."

Floret felt a gush of emotion spring up to her throat at this communication. It was the welding of the last link which completed the chain of proof to lay before the world—no, she thought not of that, she thought only of Lord Victor; for he now was her world. His was the approbation, the esteem, the respect she wanted to win; and having won it, she felt that she should have won that of all the world.

There was a narrow gap which existed between the walls of the courtyard of the mansion before which she had stopped and the one adjoining. It seemed to be a mere strip of land left for the purpose of determining the exact boundary of the two walls—a *cul de sac* which led nowhere, and was almost *apropos* of nothing.

Yet Fanny glided into this opening, and down a rather rapid decline, until the spot at

which she paused was almost enveloped in darkness.

Floret's keen eyes detected, however, that Fanny had stopped before a small door, and that she was passing her hand quickly up and down one side of the doorpost.

Presently, her hand rested on one spot; she placed her other to it, and pressed with a sudden vigor, and the door opened with a harsh creak.

"It has not been used since I was herelast," murmured Fanny. Then a spasmodic sob burst from her lips; but she placed her hand upon her throat, and prevented its repetition.

She laid hold of Floret's hand, and drew her in gently, and then closed the door.

"Bear with this way of entering the house, Miss," she whispered. "You shall leave it by the grand entrance, and as a great lady."

"What house is this, Fanny?" inquired Floret, in an excited whisper.

"Plantagenet House!" she returned; "the house in which Miss Constance—your mother, Miss—was brought up. Come."

"But Lady Westchester is not here?" suggested Floret, a little earnestly.

"She is," responded Fanny, positively. "I know it—I feel it here," she added, touching her breast, and then subjoined, in a mysterious tone: "I know it, because I have seen what is about to happen in my dreams."

She, with a light step, ascended a narrow flight of stairs, which were carpeted with a soft woollen substance, which powdered beneath their feet as they trod upon it, but completely deadened all sound.

She did not pause until she reached a door, which was closed, and apparently possessed no lock by which it could be opened. Fanny, however, found a small slide in the molding round the doorway, and drawing it down, the door opened slowly without being touched. It was hung in such a manner that it should do so.

Fanny passed through; but her further progress was barred by what appeared to be a wall, which stretched across the second doorway. She pressed it with her fingers, and it yielded slightly to her touch.

The opening had been canvassed over. Fanny seemed to understand this, and did not hesitate. She drew from her pocket a pair of scissors, which were attached by a string to girdle, and instantly cut through the obstruction an opening, through which she passed, beckoning Floret to follow her.

The latter complied, with feelings of misgiving; but she had gone too far to retreat, and so she stepped, without further hesitation, into a most tastefully and beautifully-furnished boudoir. It bore the signs of having been recently and hastily tenanted. Some articles of attire were strewn about in confusion, and some boxes were partly opened, as though their contents were about to be removed and distributed in places properly appointed to receive them.



Floret noticed Fanny gaze about her. She saw her lip quiver. She saw her brush away fast-falling tears, and press her two hands to her bosom, to keep down her rising sobs.

Having seemingly repressed her emotion, she stepped on tip-toe to the door of the adjoining room, which was partly open, and peered anxiously and earnestly within.

Presently a low, painful, quivering moan escaped her lips, and she turned away, sank on her knees, and buried her weeping face in her dress.

This ebullition of feeling lasted only for a moment; for she rose up, her face still wet with tears. She tore, rather than took off her bonnet and shawl, and rapidly removed those of Floret.

Then, seeming to act by inspiration, she drew Floret to a chair, and forced her to sit upon it, motioning, with earnest gestures, to be silent.

As soon as she saw that Floret was seated, and gazing, with an air of eager expectation, at the partly-opened door, she turned her eyes sharply about the chamber, and saw by the toilet-glass a small, neat lace cap. She seized it, and pressing her hands over her still beautiful, glossy, dark-brown hair, which was braided plain across the temple, as she used to wear it, in order to smooth it, she put on the cap, and then sat down at Floret's feet, and took one of her hands in both hers, and laid her cheek to it.

Then, before Floret could comprehend the purpose for which these movements were made, she sang, in a low, sweet, silvery voice :

"La, la, la, sol fa mi,  
My lady looked through the orange-tree."

As her voice died away on the last note, there arose a rustling in the adjoining room.

The next moment, they both beheld the Marchioness of Westchester standing in the doorway, with a look of indescribable terror, horror, and amazement depicted upon her pallid, haggard countenance.

She seemed not to see Floret: her eyes, her mind, her thoughts, seemed to be concentrated upon Fanny Shelley, whose pale face and deep brown eyes were turned earnestly toward her.

She stood motionless—transfixed with the fearful, paralyzing emotion of one who gazes upon a spectre.

She could not believe that what she beheld was other than a frightful vision. It was so utterly incredible that those two persons should be there, in real, living, corporeal form, that it was easier to believe that she was gazing upon the life-looking shadows of two who had risen from the dead.

And what did it convey to her, that the shadows of two persons who had suffered so terribly at her hands should thus present themselves to her?

A low, unearthly groan escaped her lips, as she gazed breathlessly upon them—feeling, at the same time, her flesh creep, crawl, and become blue and livid, while her blood congealed slowly in her veins.

Suddenly, in low, soft, sweet tones, but with a deep and quivering, earnest voice, which no language can fittingly describe, Fanny went on to sing :

"Yet cheeks there are—yet cheeks there are,  
Sweeter—O! good God——"

The Marchioness clasped her hands together, and slowly sank upon her knees. She stretched forth her arms, and, bending her face down to the earth, she murmured, in intensely-excited but scarcely audible tones :

"Mercy, Fanny! Mercy, my child, mercy! O God!"

Her head declined to her knees, and she would have fallen, but that Fanny sprang forward and caught her.

No sooner, however, did the cold, clammy hands of Fanny touch her, than, with a shriek of shuddering horror, she sprang partly to her feet, and staggered to a farther corner of the apartment, where she crouched down, and covered her face and eyes with her hands.

Fanny followed her gently, and said, in a voice which Constance only too well remembered :

"Miss Constance, dear Miss Constance—I know you by no other name—look upon me. I am Fanny, your devoted friend, your foster-sister—Miss—Lady Constance!"

At the sound of the voice, the Marchioness raised herself upon her knees, and gazed at her.

Fanny bore the look unflinchingly, but she looked back for one of those soft, loving looks of recognition with which this same woman of the hardened heart had been wont to bend upon her when she was a girl young as Floret; and she looked for it without finding it.

She would not be repulsed. She repeated her exclamations, and entreated her to acknowledge her with some of those looks of kindness which she had so often bestowed upon her when they were children.

"We nursed at the same breast, dear, dear foster-sister!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "You were attached to me when we were girls, and you said you loved me when you were a woman, when even we parted, as I thought—ay, and as you thought too—forever!"

Constance rose up, and turned slowly from her. She pressed her hands over eyes, and she muttered, in a tone of bewilderment :

"Is this no dream—no wild phantom of the imagination—no spectral vision conjured up by my distracted and disordered brain? Can it be real?—or am I mad, and this one of the frenzied illusions which the mad see?"

She turned slowly and shudderingly round, and once more gazed, with distended eyes and creeping flesh, upon the face of Fanny Shelley, who stood near to her, in a meek and humble attitude, with her hands crossed upon her breast. Then her eyes wandered to the face and form of Floret, who had risen from her seat, and who stood, with her countenance turned toward her, more like a statue than a living, breathing figure.

Constance removed her eyes hastily from



her, marveling. She seemed to see her again, in her rich robes of silk, glittering with diamonds. It appeared but an hour or two back that she had been so dressed, yet she was here, in her innermost private chamber, which she had inhabited herself but a few fleeting hours, habited in plain and humble attire.

It was incomprehensible and terrifying to her.

Presently she said, in a low tone, to Fanny, "Does my brain mock me?—do my eyes deceive me? Is it indeed you, Fanny?"

"It is indeed Fanny Shelley, your foster-sister?" returned Fanny, clasping her hands with an expression of entreaty to her.

Constance appeared to be very faint, and she placed her hand upon the back of an easy-chair to support herself.

"I was informed that you were dead," said Constance, speaking with some difficulty, and coughing slightly.

"To the world I was dead for a time, and all that was in it was dead to me; for it pleased Heaven to take from me my reason," returned Fanny, in a low tone.

"You were mad?" said Constance, interrogatively.

"I was, it was supposed, hopelessly mad," replied Fanny; "but it pleased the same Great Power which deprived me of my senses to restore them to me."

"How did you gain admittance here?" she interrogated, in the same feeble voice, interrupted occasionally by attacks of a short, dry cough.

"By the same secret way that I have come into and departed from this house, many times," answered Fanny.

"And why have you sought me?" she asked, her tone growing gradually colder.

"Can you ask that of me—of me, Lady Constance?" asked Fanny, with a sudden warmth of tone. "Have you forgotten what I endured and suffered for your sake the last year that I lived with you? Do you know what I had to bear after I parted from you? Do you remember what caused my madness?—and what—what—what—laid—both—my parents—in one grave?" she concluded, with a violent passion of tears.

The features of Constance seemed to contract, and her white skin to assume a pale blue tinge, but she did not reply.

"What brought me here! O Lady Constance!" she continued, through her streaming tears. "Look there!" she added, with startling vehemence, as she pointed to Floret. "Ask me what forced me away from you, I will answer you, Look there! Ask me again what brought me to you, and I will still answer, Look there!"

Constance let her eyelids fall, and she trembled in every limb, but still she did not speak. "O foster-sister, foster-sister!" cried Fanny, falling upon her knees before her, wringing her hands, and speaking with bitterness and anguish. "I was from childhood the slave of your will, your caprice. I bore with

your petulance, your haughty moods, your violent passions, and the impulses of your willfulness, without a murmur; because I knew, that beneath that cloud of impatient, mischievous, selfish humors you had still a generous, affectionate heart. Those by whom you were surrounded thought not; I knew that you had, for I had seen its workings—I had experienced its softest, gentlest, tenderest sympathies. They were lavished on me—on me, your foster-sister—the daughter, not of your parents, but of humble people. But there stands your child! Have you not one spark of tenderness—one trait of human kindness, charity, love for her, Lady Constance—woman, if you are woman—for your own flesh and blood—not only the living image of your self, but of Her, the mother of that God who died to save us all? If you would not see me fall dead at your feet, speak—not to me, but to her, your child!"

Constance shrank back, gasping, panting, trembling, but not a sound escaped her lips."

Floret moved instinctively toward her.

Fanny Shelley rose to her feet and took Floret by the hand, and, still speaking rapidly and with great excitement, said:

"You were such a girl as this," she said, "when love first stole into your heart—you had a heart then. You were such a girl as this when you made me a confidant of that love. I alone, save he who had stolen from you that heart which might have made you an angel, knew of this love. I saw its gradual development; I saw that it bore you on with the impetuosity of a whirlwind. I tried to arrest its furious progress; but you compelled me to listen, not to speak—to act, but not to think or remonstrate. I accompanied you on that cold, gray, bleak morning to the church where you married the man who has made you what you have been. It was I who journeyed with you to Beachborough, I who preserved your secret there; I who, into this world of sin, of woe, of pain, received in these arms this child—your child. It was I who bore her away from you, at your request, to dare and endure a life of poverty, toil, trial, misery. She has endured ignominy, humiliation, suffering, of which you can have no conception; she has borne all—all but shame, or vice, or crime. She—she, Lady Constance, is free from sin. I took her from you; I restore her to you. I place her on your bosom; mother of the discarded, and you will not dare to thrust her thence, if you would not call down upon you Heaven's wrathful lightning to wither and destroy you."

"Mother! mother! tell me only that I am your child, and I will bless you," cried Floret, with clasped hands.

"God have mercy upon me!" groaned Constance. Then, suddenly throwing open her arms, she caught Floret within them, and pressed her passionately to her heart, crying: "My child! my poor, abused, long-deserted child! pity me, pity me! You cannot forgive me."



She kissed Floret's forehead with a long, passionate kiss, and Floret pressed her lips to hers with almost frenzied earnestness and delight. She sank upon her knees before her, but Constance raised her up again to her bosom, and whispered, hoarsely :

"Such should be my position to you. O ! I have wronged you deeply. I have sinned ! I have sinned ! Where, where will be the end of this ? Mercy, Heaven ! I am unable to endure this dreadful emotion—let me be seated. I feel as though I were dying."

As she spoke, a violent fit of coughing seized her, which prevented further speaking, and when she ceased, a slight froth, tinged with blood, rested upon her lips.

Floret started, and gazed upon this terrible symptom with dismay. She looked at the careworn features of her mother, and observed that they not only appeared to be drawn with care and anxiety, but to be pinched and tinted with a death-like hue.

Constance wiped the froth from her lips, and to Floret's earnest inquiry respecting it, she returned an evasive answer.

"It is nothing worth heeding," she answered, with some difficulty. "It is the result of ceaseless, dreadful anxiety—of distracting fears, of tormenting doubts, of passionate regrets and remorse at the course which I have been placed. It is impossible for you, for any creature breathing, to surmise what I have suffered. I doomed you to a life of privation—God only knows what ; but I doomed myself, too, to a life which has been one long, protracted torture. If there were to be no punishment hereafter, I have been punished fearfully here ; there needs no other hell than the upbraidings of a guilty conscience—"

Here again she was seized with a violent fit of coughing, which continued for a longer period than the last, and threatened the rupture of a blood-vessel.

Again a frothy mucus, tinged with blood, bubbled upon her lips. Again Floret referred to it, but her mother wiped it impatiently away.

"It is nothing," she repeated ; "and if it be the harbinger of death, I shall welcome it."

"No, no, no," murmured Floret, tearfully ; "say not so. You will yet live to occasion me many years of happiness."

"I will try to live long enough to draw up a statement which will assign to you your proper place in society. I will declare to the world that you are the daughter of myself and my husband, Viscount Bertram, now Earl of Brackleigh—"

Floret knelt down at her mother's feet, and upraised her clasped hands.

"Almighty Heaven !" she ejaculated, with quivering lips, "accept the grateful offering of a full heart tendered in thankfulness for thy mercy."

Constance raised her, and again folded her arms around her.

"Too late found, too soon to be lost," she exclaimed. "I will render you full justice ;

at best, a poor atonement for what I have compelled you to undergo. To the statement which acknowledges you as the child of the Viscount and Viscountess Bertram, I will append a will which will give to you all I possess in the world, which has been settled upon me for my use, and to dispose of as I may see fit, and all to which I am entitled, and which may be bequeathed to me. I—will—further—make—such—such reparation—"

Again she was seized with a more terrible fit of coughing than before ; it was more violent in its symptoms, and most painful to witness, as well as to endure.

A sudden thought crossed Floret.

When Constance had partially recovered, she breathed to her the name of Hagar Lot, and, in hurried accents, asked her mother whether she had taken any liquid recently from her hand.

Constance clapped her hands to her forehead.

"O, I remember now !" she ejaculated, with a wild look of horror. "Fane told me that she saw her follow me to the study of Westchester. She has had an interview with him ; she has given him some of that dreadful powder. I took water from his hand. My God ! I am poisoned !"

"She sank back upon the chair, and closed her eyes as though she were fainting.

Floret knelt at her feet.

"Look up, dearest mother," she cried, eagerly ; "fear not ; you shall be saved."

"It is impossible. It is the gipsy's poison. It has no antidote !"

"It has !" cried Floret, with passionate vehemence. "And, Heaven be praised, I have the antidote with me."

She produced, from the bosom of her dress, the small phial which Liper Leper had given her. At her request, Fanny obtained a glass, and she poured about a spoonful of the mixture into it.

With a trembling hand she administered it to her mother, who had commenced to cough violently. Although still coughing, Constance quaffed the contents of the glass eagerly, and panted and gasped for breath horribly.

Presently the cough subsided ; a strong perspiration broke out over her, and stood in thick, white beads upon her forehead.

She placed her hand upon her throat, and then she turned to Floret, and said, in tones which sounded, in contrast to her former tone of voice, singularly clear : "I am saved !"

Floret uttered a prayer of thankfulness to Heaven, and if she ever held Liper Leper in her grateful memory with fervent warmth, she did so at that moment.

At this moment, Fane burst suddenly into the room, with a face upon which horror was imprinted.

She started back on seeing Floret and Fanny ; but, almost immediately, she wrung her hands, and exclaimed, with real emotion :

"O my Lady, prepare yourself for terrible news. Something dreadful has happened."



As she finished, Lady Henrietta hurried into the room, weeping, and wringing her hands.

"O, my child! my child!" she exclaimed, and sank, in a fit of hysterics, at her feet.

Mr. Plantagenet entered, too, with a dignified step, and was about to speak, but the white ghostly face of Constance staggered him, and the spectacle of his wife, divested of all affectation, weeping passionately, seemed to completely unman him, and, turning his head away, he covered his eyes with his handkerchief.

#### CHAPER XLX.

"His hand, unmaster'd by his rage, at will  
A thousand stabs delivers, and divides  
With the head, heart, and bosom, as his skill  
Instructs, or the unguarded part provides;  
Impetuous, rapid as the force that rides  
The whirlpool, his all present steel appears.  
The eye bewilders and its art derides;  
Where least expected, there it most careers;  
There most it strikes and wounds, where least his  
rival fears.  
Nor did it cease, until its point had found  
Twice the pure life-blood of his bosom gored."  
—TASSO.

The Earl of Brackleigh, after his return from the Countess of Newmarket's reception, and he had encountered Floret in the hall of his mansion, retired to his room with a curious sinking at the heart, and a very heavy depression of spirits.

Up to the moment of meeting Floret, he had been all fire and enthusiasm. The insults of the Marquis had roused within his breast emotions of vindictive rage, and they added flame to long-smothered feelings of revenge. He had never viewed the connection of Constance with the Marquis with any other feelings than those of angry abhorrence; and, strange to say, all his malice and rancor were heaped upon the head of the Marquis, instead of that of the guilty person.

He had no idea that Constance had interposed such an icy barrier between herself and the Marquis as she had, and occasional conceptions indulged in, when alone, of endearments bestowed by the Marquis upon her, only too frequently flung him into paroxysms of mortification and fury—paroxysms which invariably ended in an intense yearning to wipe out the stain which he considered his honor to have sustained by taking the life of the Marquis.

He had now, he believed, an opportunity of executing his long-cherished desire for vengeance, without being exactly amenable to the law. Society, he knew, would back him up, however deadly might be the nature of the satisfaction he exacted for that unpardonable affront which the Marquis had fastened upon him; and he inwardly resolved that it should not stop short of death.

He was an accomplished swordsman, and a first-rate marksman. It was a matter of no great moment to him which weapon the Marquis might select to conduct their combat with; but he unquestionably had a preference

for the pistol, for he could turn and fire with a correct aim as quick as thought, and at the same time, be sure with his bullet to strike a vital part. He, however, was very skillful with the small-sword, and had a favorite feint which seldom failed to draw his adversary to respond, and leave himself open to a fatal thrust; so when he learned from Major Alderton that the Marquis insisted on fighting with the small-sword, he smiled grimly, and made no demur, for he thought of the feint, and promised himself to drive his sword to the hilt through the body of the wretched man with whom he should be engaged in mortal strife.

Still, as we have said, there was strange, heavy depression upon him, which seemed to make him bend and cower beneath it; and though he made several desperate efforts, he found it impossible to rise superior to it.

The sudden apparition of Floret across the threshold of his own door, the aspect of her beautiful young face, with the curl of scorn upon her lip, which made her resemblance to the Marchioness, her mother, when she was her age, something startling—the haughty manner in which she passed him and left him, without a word, without an inclination of the head, without a gesture, were in themselves cause for mortification, humiliation, and irritation; but added to these, was an impression that Constance had deceived him, that Floret was actually her child and his, that the assertion that she was the daughter of Fanny Shelley was a mere concoction, and that he unintentionally was aiding Constance in driving her to destruction.

And these reflections brought with them others, which were not calculated to elevate Constance in his estimation, nor to hold the part she was playing before him in any other light than one from which he turned with a blushing cheek and a bitter sense of self-abasement.

Still, there was no retreat now; he could not avoid encountering the Marquis without drawing down upon himself a storm of scornful obloquy. He did not, indeed, wish to avoid meeting him, but he would have been glad to have faced him with cleaner hands.

Like the Marquis of Westchester, he, after his second had left him, sat down and made a disposition of all the property which he had the power of bequeathing. He left it all to "Constance Edith Plantagenet, afterward Viscountess Bertram, and subsequently known as the Marchioness of Westchester."

He paused there. He was not, however, satisfied.

He paced the room, and racked his brain to remember everything for which his Countess, though not his wife, had expressed a liking. They were no many, but he remembered them, and enumerating them, left them to her, with a prayer, that though he knew she could never forgive him for the grievous wrong he had done her, she would not curse his memory.



This done, he tried to believe that he had finished the disposition of his property. But, no! Floret's face would present itself before his eyes, and some inward voice would keep repeating: "It is your child—it is your child!"

He tried to busy himself about other matters. He looked out a pair of dueling-pistols; saw that they were clean and free from rust, that the implements belonging to them were in the case, and that there were bullets ready for use—nay, he loaded one pistol—still with one thought passing and repassing through his brain.

"It is your child, it is your child!" murmured the thought, with a moaning monotony.

Unable to bear it, he seized a pen, and referring again to his last will, he added, after the words Marchioness of Westchester—"and to her daughter—or to any child of hers which may be also able to prove, beyond a doubt, that is likewise my child—to be justly and fairly, and equally divided between them."

He was more satisfied when he had done this, and then he rang for his valet and Nat. He signed the paper in their presence, and made them attest it. He then sealed it up in an envelope, and addressed it to Mr. Plantagenet. He handed it to his valet, and ordered him to forward it to its destination, unless he gave him orders in the morning to the contrary.

He then directed Nat to be at the door with a light open carriage, drawn by a pair of horses, at five o'clock; then he dismissed them both.

The remainder of the time was passed by him in a kind of lethargic stupor, out of which he was unable to rouse himself. An overwhelming sense of some tremendous impending evil seemed to stupify him with gloom, and to paralyze every effort which he made to throw it off.

At length the chiming of a church-clock told him that it wanted a quarter to five, and he prepared to attire himself for departure.

Major Alderton was to be at the door as the clock struck five. He knew him to be one of the most punctual men living; and in such an affair he was more likely to be ten minutes before his time than five minutes after it.

It wanted five minutes to the time. He had a strange desire to look upon the face of the Countess of Brackleigh ere he departed. He had never felt so deeply as at that moment how much he had wronged her. Under the impulse, he moved toward her apartments. He had an impression that she would be sleeping, and would not hear him enter her room—would, perhaps, never know that he had imprinted one, at least, sincere kiss upon her forehead; the last his lips would ever place there.

As he stepped slowly and nervously forward, he was suddenly startled, and his progress was arrested by a loud, shrill, piercing

agonized shriek, which proceeded from his wife's apartment, and rang horribly throughout the whole house.

He turned as white as ashes and as cold as death.

He caught at a piece of furniture and clung to it, to save him from sinking to the ground.

The scream was repeated yet more wildly than before, curdling his blood, and making it freeze in his veins.

This fearful sound was followed immediately by the violent ringing of two or three bells, by the slamming of several doors, and the hurried pattering of feet along the corridor.

Presently, the sound of footsteps, hastily approaching the spot where he stood, compelled him to exert something like self-possession, and, by a strong exertion, he endeavored to assume a calm demeanor.

As he did so, he perceived Subtle, the Countess's maid, swiftly approaching him with a distracted air.

The moment she perceived him, she wrung her hands, and, sobbing piteously, cried out: "O my Lord, come back with me! O! for Heaven's sake, come to my mistress—my dear, dear mistress! Quick, my Lord! O! great Heaven, help us! O my poor Lady—my dear Lady!"

The face of the Earl of Brackleigh was something awful to behold, as he listened to the ravings of the woman, and saw her fearfully excited manner.

"What has happened, woman," he exclaimed, hoarsely, "to occasion this uproar and frenzy? Speak! What has happened?"

"O my Lord!" cried the woman, still wringing her upraised hands; "I cannot tell you; I beg you to accompany me to the chamber of my Lady!"

"Be silent, then," he gasped, "and lead on."

Sobbing and muttering, Subtle hastened from the room, followed by the Earl, who was quite unable to imagine what had happened, and dreaded to surmise.

As they reached the door of the Countess's chamber, they saw there a man muffled in a cloak. He turned to the Earl, and said:

"In the name of Heaven, my Lord, what has happened?"

The Earl looked sternly at him, and said, haughtily:

"I do not know you! Who and what are you?"

"I am an intimate friend of Major Alderton," he replied, readily. "I am a surgeon, and, at his request, I am here to accompany him, and—"

"I understand, Sir," interrupted the Earl. "But surely that does not account for your presence on this spot?"

"No; but you will comprehend the cause of my being within your house," answered the surgeon, "when I explain that I was standing outside your house when your groom drove up. Almost at the same moment, a servant



rushed from the hall-door, with a very excited manner, and your groom questioned her, not only as to the cause of her excitement, but whither she was going. She said something dreadful had happened, and that she was hurrying for a doctor. I instantly mentioned that I was one; and I have returned with her to offer my services, if they are needed, on the instant."

"I do not know what has occurred; but I am greatly obliged by your promptness in rendering services which I have no doubt will prove valuable," responded the Earl. Then he turned to Subtle, and said, sharply, "What has taken place? Speak, woman, and cease this mummerly!"

The woman pointed to the chamber, gasped twice or thrice, screamed, and then fainted upon the floor.

With a sudden wrench at the handle of the door, he opened it, and entered it.

The cold blue light of the dawning morning shone in through the windows, and gave to everything within the room a ghastly look.

Before him, seated in her chair, with eyes staring full at him, with an expression which froze him utterly, was seated, upright and rigid, the Countess of Brackleigh.

She was dressed in the full evening dress which she had worn the evening previously. Upon her head was a white wreath, glittering with jewels; around her neck, upon her bare arms, were jewels glistening and glittering.

The hue of her skin was livid; the expression upon her features was indescribably horrible.

The Earl stood spell-bound. He was frozen to the spot—convulsed with an emotion which no words can aptly describe.

"Good God!" ejaculated the surgeon, as he cast his eyes upon the Countess. He ran hastily forward, and laid his hand upon her wrist.

He turned his face awe-stricken to the Earl, and in a low, it seemed an unearthly, tone, said:

"SHE IS DEAD!"

The Earl tottered, staggered, turned round, and fell heavily upon the floor.

The Doctor was in an instant at his side, administering a restorative; for he had swooned.

In hasty and imperative terms he bade the several servants who had come, alarmed by Subtle's shrieks, to the room-door, to lift up the body of the Countess, lay her gently on the bed, and cover her with a sheet.

This was done before the Earl was restored to consciousness.

When he had revived, and could comprehend what had occurred, the Doctor whispered a few words in his ear, partly of consolation, partly to nerve him, and to make him control the dreadful emotion which was raging in his breast.

He did not speak when the Doctor addressed him, but his upper lip quivered visibly, as though he wished to do so and had not the power. "How did this happen?" inquired the Doctor of Subtle.

"I do not know, Sir," she returned. "All I can tell you is, that my Lady returned from the Countess of Newmarket's last night; it and seemed to me, Sir, as if her brain had been crushed, destroyed, Sir, by something that had happened. She refused to let me remove her dress. She spoke of going out again, something about policemen and magistrates, but nothing coherent. I begged her to let me summon the Earl to her, but she refused in a very angry manner. I implored her to allow me to fetch her medical attendant; for I could see that she was very ill, and looked as I had never seen her before—"

"How?" asked the Doctor.

"I do not know how to explain to you, Sir, but she seemed horror-struck and terrified; she listened intently for sounds, and stared at me dreadfully—"

Subtle burst into tears again.

"I went down on my knees to her," she continued, weeping bitterly all the time, "and begged her to let me summon assistance to her; but she then seemed to recover himself for a minute or two. She told me to rise up, and bade me not be anxious about her—that she should be better in a few minutes. She ordered me to go to bed, and said that she would sleep where she was for an hour or two, and would ring for me when she wanted me to undress her. I went to bed—I see now how wrong I was to do so—but felt very uneasy about her; at last, after waiting a long and weary time for her bell to ring, I went, uncalled into her room, and found my lady—as—as you, Sir, saw her—and—and my Lord—"

The woman's voice was choked with sobs, and the Doctor bade her retire, and compose herself.

"This has been some awful pressure upon the brain, which her ladyship has not had the physical strength to withstand," he remarked, after a moment's pause; "it has been borne for a length of time, but it reached its climax of unendurable agony last night—"

The Earl waved his hand for him to be silent:

Then he said to him, in a hollow voice:

"There is no hope?"

"None," he answered, shaking his head. "Her ladyship has been dead two or three hours."

The Earl turned from him:

"A broken heart," he muttered.

Approaching the bed upon which the Countess was laid, he knelt down by its side, laid his face upon the coverlet, and pressed his clenched hands upon his forehead.

He remained in this posture for some few minutes, and then he arose.

His face was as white as marble; but his features, though they had a hard, set expression, appeared to be more composed than might have been expected. But there was a bright red rim about his eyelids.

He turned to the Doctor, and said, in a



voice which grated unpleasantly upon his ear:

"Come, Doctor, we must hurry away; we shall be late."

"My God!" ejaculated the Doctor; "you will not go under these terrible circumstances?"

The Earl set his teeth together.

"Will I not!" he hissed through them.

A servant approached the room-door, and, in a very subdued tone, said to the Earl:

"May it please you, my Lord, Major Alderton wishes to speak one word with you. The Major says:

"Enough!" interrupted the Earl, impatiently.

He went up to Subtle, and whispered:

"I shall return here by eight o'clock, or—I have given my valet instructions what to do, should my absence be extended after that hour. Come, Doctor."

"My Lord, reflect," urged the Doctor.

"I have," he replied, laconically, "and I have decided."

As he spoke, he moved to the room-door. He gave one glance at the white sheet which covered the still form of the hapless woman, whose death lay now heavy upon his right hand, and he shuddered.

He returned to his room, took up his case of pistols, put them under his arm, and then descended the stairs with a hurried step, and a thoughtful, dull, and heavy aspect.

On reaching the door, the Earl moved rapidly to the vehicle, nodded to his friend, Major Alderton, sprang up on to the carriage, barely gave the Doctor time to scramble in, when he said to Nat, in a tone which the latter understood:

"Away with you!—gallop!"

The Major had already given Nat instructions whither to go, and he started the horses off at a tremendous pace.

Nat had a misgiving of what was about to happen. When he saw the Earl's face, as he emerged from the mansion, he gazed at it, scared and aghast.

He was certain something very dreadful had occurred at Brackleigh Mansion, and that something as terrible was about to take place where they were going; but he could not surmise what.

He was deeply interested in both cases; for, as yet, he had received nothing but promises toward the purchase of that "stunnin' pub", and the solemnization of marriage with that "ere fair party".

He glanced at the Earl as often as he dared, and then at the Major, and occasionally at the gentleman who had declared himself to be a Doctor. His inspections were not reassuring. He believed, at last, with an unpleasant sinking of the spirits, that he was driving out a shooting-party, but that birds were not the object of the sport upon which it was their intention to be engaged.

The horses were remarkably fast, and being pushed, and meeting with no impediment on

their way, they performed their journey in a very short space of time.

On reaching a turn in a winding lane, they observed a carriage somewhat similar to their own, with a pair of reeking horses, drawn up under a hedge. The white stream from the animals was rolling up in volumes, and it was evident that they had been driven fast, too.

The Major called upon Nat to pull up where they were, and he obeyed instant. Jumping down, the Major was followed by the Earl and the Doctor, and Nat was left in charge of the vehicle.

A few minutes brought them to the spot where the Marquis of Westchester was standing, conversing with General Edmond and the regimental Surgeon. The Major looked nervously at his watch. It wanted five minutes to six: a sigh of relief escaped him.

He instantly hurried up to the General, took him aside, and conferred with him in anxious and earnest tones. The General seemed moved; and when the Major ceased speaking to him, he walked thoughtfully up to the Marquis.

"Westchester!" he said, in a low tone; "a very shocking event has happened, and it is only right that you should be made acquainted with it."

"What is it?" inquired the Marquis, impatiently.

"The Countess of Brackleigh was discovered dead just before the Earl departed!"

The Marquis gazed at him with amazement.

"Dead!" he ejaculated.

"Yes!" replied the General. "It was very sudden—very unexpected—very horrible, I believe. Don't you think that, as a mere matter of human feeling, and of respect for the memory of the departed lady, we had better postpone this affair?"

The Marquis reflected for a minute, but for a minute only.

The Earl was free—free now to claim the Marchioness, and declare her before all the world to be his wife, and he would have no power to interfere or to prevent it. That thought decided him.

He turned sharply to the General.

"Postpone it!" he exclaimed, emphatically, "certainly not!"

"But the circumstances, man alive!" urged the General.

"Are only such as to make me more eager for the meeting!" he rejoined. "You do not know the Earl—I do. The death of his wife at such a moment is very suspicious. He has strong reasons to wish for her death. I should not be surprised to learn that poison—"

"Hush! hush!" interrupted the General; "murder, what would you insinuate?"

"I care not!" replied the Marquis, excitedly; "anything, everything, rather than he should be permitted to sneak out of meeting me, foot to foot, face to face!"



"If it's that you mane, I've nothing further to say, Westchester!" responded the General; "only just this, your goin' to work a little more like a butcher than a gentleman!"

"How?" ejaculated the Marquis, fiercely.

"Whisht!—we'll settle our trifling discussion on this point afterward!" observed the General, with a somewhat distant manner. "Your little quarrel would have kept until it would have been decent to fight it out; but, since you are so determined, the devil a help there's for it; and so you must fight!"

"I am determined!" said the Marquis, grating his teeth.

"The bloodthirsty, murtherin' villain!" muttered the General to himself. "By the maiden aunt of Moses, he manes killing his man, if he does not first get pinked himself!"

The Marquis produced the swords, and the General handed them to the Major, who measured them carefully, and found them to be of equal length; he placed them in the hands of the Earl of Brackleigh, who examined the blades, apparently with some curiosity; but he did not measure the weapons.

He divested himself of his coat, vest, and neckcloth, and bared his right arm to the elbow.

The Marquis did the same, and then advanced with a calm, measured step toward the Earl.

The seconds, each armed with a sword, closed up, the two Doctors arranging themselves at a moderate distance from the combatants.

The Earl raised up the swords and confronted the Marquis.

The faces of both men were perfectly colorless, and the expression upon each of their countenances was such as it would be well if it could never be seen upon the "human face divine."

They looked into each other's eyes, and their orbs gleamed with a malignant ferocity. The two seconds observed their murderous gaze at each other, and exchanged glances.

A gesture by the General was understood by the Major; and they both watched, with almost nervous anxiety, the conduct of their respective principals.

The Earl tendered the handles of the swords, holding the blades, to the Marquis. As he did so, he said, in an undertone:

"Should these weapons fail, I have pistols."

He pointed to the spot where he had placed them upon the ground.

Without looking at them, the Marquis took one of the swords, and then placing himself in an attitude, he exposed his breast, that the Earl might measure the distance; the Earl did the same. They both recovered their respective positions, and then they commenced the deadly fray.

It was quickly observable that it was not the intention of either to protract the combat. They both attacked and defended with

great determination and consummate skill. After a somewhat lengthy and severe struggle, they both paused.

Upon the sleeves of the shirts of both, blood was visible in two or three places, showing that some hits had been made on both sides, though not of any serious moment.

The two seconds, upon observing them, as by consent, rest, both approached.

"Stand back," thundered the Marquis. "To your guard!" he shouted to the Earl, and renewed the contest with a violence and fury which he had not before exhibited.

The Earl parried his thrusts like lightning; and the clash of swords, so sharp, so swift, so incessant, wound up the seconds to a pitch of intense excitement.

The Marquis kept up his violent attack; he pressed on the Earl, he forced him to give ground, but, notwithstanding the rapidity with which he used his sword, the Earl successfully foiled him at all points.

But his blood had been roused up until it boiled. He began to feel exhausted, and insensibly he, too, commenced to fight with desperate fury and determination; and suddenly, in one of their most furious and rapid passages, a sudden sharp ring was heard—the sword of the Marquis broke short off near the guard, and went flying in the air; at the same moment, the sword of the Earl passed through his body up to the hilt.

He drew it out ensanguined, and waved it thrice sharply in the air.

The Marquis staggered, and fell.

He fell close to the pistol-case.

His half-glazed eyes caught sight of the weapons within it. He seized one; it was the only one loaded.

He pointed it at the Earl, and pulled the trigger.

It was a hair-trigger; a puff of wind almost would have moved it; there was a flash and a report.

A shriek burst from the lips of the Earl, and he fell back motionless upon the ground.

The surgeons and seconds each attended their men.

The Marquis was bleeding fearfully from his wound, which was close in the proximity of the heart, if it had not touched it.

The Doctor raised him gently up, and he gasped twice or thrice. His eyes opened and shut several times.

He tried to speak, but no sound came from his lips; and then there was a sharp convulsive shudder passed through his frame, and his jaw fell.

"God preserve us!" ejaculated the General; "he is dead."

The Doctor laid him tenderly upon the grass.

"He is dead," he said, quietly. "Let us see whether we can do anything with the other man."

They hurried up to the Earl of Brackleigh, and found the surgeon attending to a pistol-shot wound, which passed through his chest,



touching his lungs, and had gone out beneath his left shoulder.

The surgeon who had attended the Marquis assisted to stop the hemorrhage, which was very great, and while they were doing so, the Earl revived; he looked dreamily around him, then upon the faces of those who were bending over him.

After two or three efforts to speak, he said, in a whisper—a horrible whisper it was:

"Where is the Marquis?"

"In heaven, it is to be hoped!" exclaimed one of the surgeons.

"If they admit murderers in that holy place," observed the General, with a gloomy brow: "By the holy saints, my Lord Brackleigh, you've been killed by a very dirty paice of murder, anyway."

"Is he dead?" asked the Earl, eagerly.

"He is," replied the surgeon, in whose arms he had died.

"You are sure?"

"Positive."

"I am glad that it is so; it is better that he should be dead than live on," he murmured.

He became silent for a short time while the surgeons were occupied in bandaging him up.

Presently he said, in a low, hoarse whisper to the Doctor who had accompanied him to the ground:

"I may rely upon your telling me the truth. Answer me: this wound I have received is mortal, is it not?"

The Doctor turned away his face with a sad expression upon it.

"Answer me," he murmured. "Understand—it is my most earnest desire that it should be so. I have done with life; but it is my wish to make some amends for wrongs I have committed, and to make my peace with an offended Maker, if I can, while there is yet time."

"Your wound is mortal," replied the Doctor, in low, solemn tones.

"I am satisfied," he rejoined. "Now tell me how long I have yet to live."

"About six hours," returned the Doctor, sadly; "you must not hope to survive beyond that period."

"Take me as quickly as you can to Plantagenet House!" he exclaimed.

They looked at him with surprise.

He raised his white hands in a suppliant attitude to them.

"Be merciful to me," he said, faintly; "ask me no questions, but bear me there."

He was carefully wrapped in a cloak, and the four individuals by whom he was surrounded carried him slowly and carefully to his carriage, in which he was placed with the greatest possible tenderness and gentleness—no little to the amazement of Nat, who, when he saw the Earl's pale face, with scarcely a sign of life in it, felt his heart fall like a lump of lead in his body.

They then returned, and, raising up the dead body of the Marquis, the General and the surgeon took charge of it, bore it to the carriage,

and drove off at a swift pace to Westchester House.

Nat, instructed by the surgeon, moved only at a snail's pace, for fear that the jarring or jolting of the carriage should increase the internal hemorrhage which was going on in the body of the Earl.

On reaching Plantagenet House, the Earl was borne into the house, and conveyed to a bedchamber.

As soon as he was laid upon a bed, he sent for Lady Henrietta Plantagenet, and before she had got over the horror of witnessing him in that frightful condition, he briefly explained his connection with her daughter to her, and begged to be permitted to see her.

Lady Henrietta sought Mr. Plantagenet, and revealed to him what she had heard from the Earl. He listened to her with amazement, and himself hurried to the Earl's chamber.

The surgeon, however, intervened, and pointed out to him that, as the Earl had scarcely an hour to live, it would be proper to stifle all indignation, and suffer him to have his last interview in peace with the lady, who, in his dying hour, he solemnly declared to be his wife.

Then, dumbfounded, overwhelmed with amazement, bewildered, oppressed with grief and horror, they together sought their daughter's chamber.

## CHAPTER LXI.

"My lord, my love,

I know you look on me as the cause,  
The fatal cause of all your ills. Too true!  
That guilt was mine—O, would to Heaven this head  
Had been laid low in earth ere that sad hour."

—EURIDICE.

The Lady Henrietta Plantagenet was a poor hand at breaking painful intelligence. It was with great difficulty that Constance could, between her paroxysms of grief, gather anything approaching to a resemblance of the unwelcome tidings which she had to communicate; but, at last, she gathered that the Earl was in a chamber below, one mass of wounds, and bleeding to death; and she surmised that a sanguinary duel had been fought between him and the Marquis of Westchester.

Her mother had blurted out to her that she must make haste and see the Earl, who was dying rapidly, and that he was already delirious; for he would insist that she was his wife.

Of all her trials, of all the terrible and unexpected shocks which Constance had ever received, the intelligence which her mother now bore to her was certainly the heaviest and the most terrible; but she received it with more calmness and firmness, perhaps, because she knew that it must be the last. Nothing could surpass it in agony and horror; and she almost felt a strange indescribable relief in knowing that the worst had come at last.

She felt very weak, very hysterical, very, very ill; her brain seemed crushed beneath a heavy pressure, and she felt as if some un-



hostile power was dragging her heart down—down to perdition.

Utterly hopeless, now wholly despairing of any peace in the future, she prepared to go through the last scene in the terrible drama in which she had played so important, and so bad a part.

She turned to Floret, and took her by the hand.

"Come," she said, in a clear but hollow voice. "Come, my child; this interview must be passed through between you and me and him alone."

A faint scream burst from the lips of the Lady Henrietta as Constance addressed Floret as her child; and Mr. Plantagenet staggered back, as though he had been struck by a blow.

Constance noticed their emotion.

She said to her father, in earnest tones:

"I have been wicked, Sir; but I have brought no shame upon the name of Plantagenet."

She pointed to Fanny Shelley.

"There sits my foster-sister. Ask my secret history, while I still remained a Plantagenet, from her; I release her from every promise of secrecy which she made to me."

She pressed Floret's hand.

"Come," she said, in a voice which trembled now, "the moments are precious to us. Each drop of blood bears away a minute of life."

They descended to the chamber, in which was lying, nearly senseless, the Earl of Brackley.

The Countess motioned to the Doctor, and to a woman, who had been hastily brought there as a nurse, to retire.

He understood, at a glance, who she was, and, bowing, he glided to the door, followed by the nurse.

Constance knelt down by the bedside, and Floret, half fainting, knelt too.

"Bertram," ejaculated Constance, in a gentle tone, yet one which quivered with the intensity of the emotion she was suffering.

He appeared to be dozing; but, at the sound of her voice, he turned his face quickly, and stretched forth his white thin hand.

She took it, bent her face over it, and bathed it in her scorching bitter tears. She sobbed so very passionately, and her frame shook so convulsively, that it seemed as though her heart would burst within her body.

He perceived the violence of her emotion, and he said, gently:

"Do not grieve, Constance: My hour has come, and we must part for ever. Do not recur to the past—"

"I—I have slain you!" she ejaculated, with bitter anguish. O Bertram, Bertram! how can I bare my heart before you, to show you the agonizing repentance with which I recall my madness, my wickedness—"

"Cease, Constance, to speak of it—to me," he interposed, feebly, but earnestly. "I have gained so much, that, when you refer to your

errors, you but make me feel my own more deeply. It was I who led you into a secret marriage—the most fatal mode of blending two hearts together, which was ever conceived by a weak and inexperienced head. By urging you to take that step, I sowed the seed of all which has followed. I must not throw blame upon you, because I have reaped the rank and bitter weeds which I myself have sown. Let us speak only of the future. I have something on my mind—which—I—O God of Heaven! is it that I am delirious, or is there a figure kneeling by your side—a form I saw last night—a face which has haunted me since? Constance, is it a reality—or only my distempered imagination?"

Constance twined her arm about Floret's neck, and drew her closer to Bertram; but she wept so frantically, that she could not articulate a word.

Bertram still kept his faint eyes fixed on Floret's face, and, gazing into her humid eyes, said:

"In the name of mercy, in the name of Heaven, if you have life, speak to me. Who are you!"

Floret gasped spasmodically; but she forced out the words:

"I am your child—I am your child! You have denied me; but, indeed—indeed—I am your own child!"

"Constance!" he groaned, turning to his wife; "as you hope for mercy hereafter, speak to me. Who is that by your side?"

"Bertram!" she half screamed, that she might force her words out. "Bertram, it is your child and mine! She was born at Beachborough Abbey before we parted. I—I—am to blame!—I only am to blame! O, mercy—mercy—do not curse me, Bertram—do not curse me!"

She sank prostrate upon the bedside.

"Almighty God, for this mercy I thank Thee!" ejaculated Bertram, with intense fervor; "to have lived over this moment disarms Fate of any further power to grieve me!"

He turned his face to Floret.

"My poor child!" he murmured; "my poor girl; how you have been wronged; how you must have suffered. O! if I had but known that you were mine—what happiness—what joy it would have been to me, to have reared you, to have loved you, to have made you my pride—my happiness!"

Constance wept in an agonized manner. Every word was a poisoned dagger plunged into her heart.

Floret, too, was overcome with intense emotion. Those unusual words of tenderness; those tokens of recognition; those acknowledgments of paternal love, overwhelmed her, and took away from her all power but that of weeping.

The hot tears, too, poured down Bertram's cheeks; and for a minute or so there was a dead silence.

The Earl broke it. He said to Floret, tenderly:



"Kiss me—my dear child—too late known—too shortly beloved!"

O, how poor Floret clung round his neck. Nature exerted her supremacy; for, though Floret had not actually, until this moment, been sure that the Earl was her father—she felt, as she clung to him, that he was indeed so now; that she could love him with an excess of filial tenderness; and that that love was created in her breast at the very moment he was about to be snatched from her.

And then she shrank hastily back, as though she had overstepped some limit which she should not have passed; and she looked timidly at her mother—looked at her—only to bring her to her feet, and implore of her, in wild accents, to forgive the long course of cruelty which she had practiced toward her.

What could Floret do, but fling her arms about her mother's neck, sob upon her bosom, and entreat of her not to speak of forgiveness, for that her recognition of her now had obliterated the past from her memory.

The Earl turned his eyes to Constance, and said, in almost unearthly tones:

"I feel that I am sinking fast, and that the time is rapidly approaching when I shall cease to be. Constance, my love—my first love—my only and my lost love, when I am gone, believe that I only regarded you in these last moments as when I met you—as young, bright, beautiful as she who now stands by your side—our child. Constance, I know that you loved me; and that, though your mind was estranged from me, it returned back to its old affection, and would have remained firm and loyal to it to the last."

"O Bertram, Bertram!" cried Constance, still upon her knees, "hear me—believe me, in the face of the Supreme Creator, who gazes down upon us both at this dread moment, that I speak the truth to you. I have been true to you, Bertram—my husband—true to that marriage-vow which bound my honor to yours—true in thought, in deed, in look. Chaste, I swear, Bertram. Do not die without believing in your heart and soul, that the immaculate purity, which you purchased at the altar with solemn vows, bears, even now, not a tinge or taint of shame upon it."

"I die happy!" he ejaculated, with a fervor which language would only inadequately describe.

"Happy!" ejaculated a hoarse voice. "Look upon my face and repeat those words?"

They all turned, and beheld Hagar Lot standing close behind them.

The Marchioness sprang to her feet.

"Wretch! monster! fiend!" she exclaimed, excitedly; "how dare you intrude into this chamber of death?"

She raised her hand to pull a bell, the handle of which was near to her, violently; but Hagar caught her by the wrist, and held her firmly.

Bertram turned his faint eyes upon her, and muttered:

"I have wronged you deeply—your pres-

ence here rebukes me. I grieve deeply for the wrong I inflicted upon you. I pray you pardon me!"

Constance looked at both amazed; but she recovered herself somewhat, and flung off the hand of Hagar, and, catching the bell-ropes, pulled it violently.

At the same moment Bertram whispered, hurriedly:

"My wife—my child—one last embrace!"

They bent, sobbing, over him, and Constance pressed her lips to his. Floret took his cold hand, and kissed it, and rained tears upon it.

Hagar Lot seemingly, with a sudden madness, dragged Floret back; and then again seizing the wrist of the Marchioness, so that she shrieked with pain, she dragged her from Bertram's motionless form.

"The place of the Countess of Brackleigh is here, side by side with me!" she cried, in a low and fierce tones; "but it is her spirit only which hovers above us, for she is dead—dead of a broken heart; slain—slain by him who lies there. My hour is near at hand, and think you, woman, that you can escape."

She gripped the wrist of the Countess again, and caused her such acute pain that she shrieked with agony.

Then, as the door opened hastily, she flung off her hand, and glided out of the apartment, unnoticed by the several persons who entered excitedly, believing that the worst had happened.

And so it had.

The Earl was dead!

## CHAPTER LXII.

"From hence let proud resisting mortals know  
The arm parental and indulgent blow.  
To Heaven's corrective rod submissive bend;  
Adore its wisdom, on its power depend;  
Whilst ruling justice guides eternal sway,  
Let Nature tremble, and let man obey."

—THE EARL OF ESSEX.

After a long fit of insensibility, Constance, when restored to life, displayed remarkable calmness and firmness of manner. She was very ghastly pale, weak in voice, feeble in movement, but singularly self-possessed and emotionless.

She directed, as soon as the coffin had been constructed and the Earl placed in it, that he should be conveyed to Brackleigh mansion. She sent for the father of the late Countess, who was there grieving over the sad fate of his daughter, and she was alone in conversation with him an hour or more.

The result of that conversation was, that the Earl and Countess were buried in one grave.

She herself directed, with the same remarkable control of all emotion, and superintended the funeral obsequies of the Marquis of Westchester.

The duel had been preserved as a secret, and he was buried with all the pomp and pageantry he could have wished had he been living.

Lord Nihilalbum would have been chief mourner, but he was laid up with a bad cold.



wound, which he had received in a duel with the Marquis of Broadlands. The bullet of the latter had shattered the forearm which directed his own pistol. He had been carried, strangely enough by his own desire, to the mansion of the late Marquis of Westchester, which he had for years looked upon as a second home, and he was there chiefly attended by Fane, who had returned with the Marchioness for a short time to Westchester House, to superintend the removal of everything which belonged to her, and to make those final arrangements which should terminate her connection with that house for ever.

The Marquis, the Earl, and his Countess were buried, rather by accident than by design, on the same day, but far apart; and after that day the Marchioness addressed herself to Lady Susan Vaughan, and made Floret her medium of communication.

As the object was the restoration of Ida to her legitimate position, it may be imagined with what pleasure, sad as she was, Floret undertook her task.

It may be imagined, also, with what felicity Ida found herself restored to her mother, who had recovered her senses completely, and who coveted her now grand position only for the sake of her daughter.

It may be likewise imagined that the Hon. Hyde Vaughan contemplated the change in Ida's condition with gratification, which was heightened—we dare not say how much—by the naive confession of Ida to him, that she was delighted with her changed position, because it would enable her to meet him, talk to him, think of him as her equal, not as an Apollo, who was a deity far above her reach.

With the installation of the Marchioness of Westchester, *nee* Ada Vian, and her daughter, in her true position, Constance devoted herself to the placing Floret—no more, but Constance now—in her proper position.

Floret, in some long conversation which had taken place between them, frankly acquainted her with all that had taken place between her and Victor, Marquis of Broadlands. Constance instantly summoned him to meet herself and Floret, and she laid before him, without reserve, the history of her own marriage with the Viscount Bertram and of Floret's birth, together with her subsequent desertion of her. She furnished him, also, with all the necessary evidence which would support her statements; but he returned them to her, and told her that he should still have felt honored by the hand of Floret, if she had remained what he had found her—a Poor Girl.

In his hands, however, the Marchioness insisted on depositing all the necessary documents, and to him and to the Lady Henrietta Plantagenet she devolved the task of placing Floret's true position before the world.

She seemed all this time to be the victim of an attack of atrophy. She grew feebler, weaker, thinner, every day. Still she exerted

herself resolutely to finish and complete all the tasks she had set herself to perform.

And she did them all.

Then she was missed from Plantagenet House.

Search was made in vain for her in every direction.

At the end of the week, the bodies of two women were discovered by the Marquis of Broadlands, during an unflagging search for Constance, both dead, at the foot of the grave of the Earl and Countess of Brackleigh.

One was fair, aristocratic in appearance and dress, but thin, and wasted to a shadow.

The other was a gipsy.

The weather had been wild and stormy the whole week. The drenched garments of both women told that they had been exposed to the fury of the tempests from their commencement.

To the faded scarlet cloak of the gipsy was appended a paper, upon which was written some words which, from the ink having been saturated with water, were scarcely decipherable; they were, however, made out, and ran as follows:

"I have fallen by my own hand. I die at the foot of the grave of him whom I loved, and who ruined and destroyed me. By my side lies the woman, dead, who stole his heart from me. Her life was forfeit to me. I took it with my own fatal grip. She came here to die. I watched her, and did not disturb her last moments. She died with a blessing for him on her lips: I coupled with it a curse. My spirit is now following hers, to appear at the bar of Eternal Justice."

An anonymous communication directed the Marquis of Broadlands to the spot where he discovered them. He kept the paper, had the body of Constance conveyed to her home, and the body of Hagar Lot he surrendered to some gipsies, who came forward and claimed it, and who interred it with their own rites and ceremonies.

Constance, was buried privately, and strenuous efforts were made to avoid everything which would set the merciless tongues of society in motion; and the efforts succeeded, for the sad events, strange as they were, did not even become a nine-days' wonder.

\* \* \* \* \*

Twelve months had passed away, and let us examine what then was the situation. We know the fates of the Marquis of Westchester, of Constance and Bertram, of the Countess of Brackleigh, and of Hagar Lot. Let us see how the other folks progressed during that period.

First of all, let us revert to Liper Liper.

After the death of Hagar Lot, he presented himself before Floret in the plain dress of a gentleman. She scarcely knew him in this garb, yet a glance at his melancholy eyes and pensive face enabled her to recognize him.

She was in deep mourning, still in grief at the loss of her new-found parents, but her countenance was hopeful, and it was plain to him that she was looking forward to a happy future.

His face, on the contrary, wore a hopeless expression.



"I appear before you, White Rose," he said, "to take my farewell of you forever!"

"Do not say so, Liper," she responded, a tear springing into her eye.

"Nay," he said sadly, "I have no tie to bind me longer here."

"Not one—not one—O, Liper! not one?" she asked, earnestly.

"Not one," he replied, slowly shaking his head.

"You are cruel," she returned, with emotion.

"Liper, you were to me a brother, a savior, more than a friend; but for you, in my misery, what could I have done? You shielded me from evil, protected me from harm, counseled me when I was bewildered, turned me from willfulness when I should have erred, soothed me when my overcharged heart was bursting, supported, sustained, enabled me to appear in the position to which I have arrived without a blush on my cheek, without a memory which rankles in my brain. Liper, do you think I have a short-lived memory? Do you think I have no heart—no feeling? Do you think I do not regard you as one of the dearest ties which bind me to life? O Liper, you wrong my nature, you pain me cruelly, you wound me greatly—indeed, you do!"

He bit his lip, and compressed his hands together, as she turned from him. Then, when able to command his voice, he said, with a slight quiver in its tone:

"White Rose—my own pure, fair White Rose—do not misconceive me. I know your nature—no living, breathing, creature knows it better. I worship it, for it is high and noble, and pure—all that can make woman resemble, not alone an angel, but a goddess. I reverence it, too, for it bears a true woman's pure, loving, gentle heart. Think you, White Rose, knowing this, that I could believe you to be unmindful of the days we have passed together, of the scenes we have passed through, of the trifling services which I have been enabled to render you? No, it is your generous gratitude which not alone amply repays me, but serves as a tie to bind me to life. O flower of young and sweet womanly sympathy! I appreciate your tenderness and consideration to me as warmly and as earnestly as if it were dictated by the same love which was borne to me in my childhood by my sister, who is in the spirit-land. Like, however, that shining love, I can from a distance offer up to it my adoration—from a distance. White Rose, I shall regard your gentle gratitude, your generous wishes, and your to me most dear esteem, as the lode-star which will conduct me through the path of honor to the goal I hope to attain. Most deeply, most gratefully, do I accept your kind sympathy, flower of my soul! so dearly that it wins from me the last regret I should have in leaving this land, for now I know that I bear with me your sisterly affection. My love lies buried in a gipsy's grave; but my remembrance of you, O fair and tender lily! will still make the world in which I go to offer my life in the cause of lib-

erty, a paradise; the laurels I may gain, green, shining, and glorious, because your gentle thoughts will be with me—your sweet praise be bestowed upon them. Farewell! O white and spotless flower of your race! and if the prayers of one so humble in the eyes of Heaven as myself, can influence favorably your future, so as to insure it being one of unalloyed happiness, be assured of those of him known only to you as Liper Liper!"

He bent his knee to her, pressed his lips to her hand, and, before her trembling voice could make itself heard, he disappeared.

She felt when he had departed, as though she had lost a dear and valued friend by death, and she did not that day quit her room again.

Of Fanny Shelley, it may be said that she was fully restored to her senses. After she had got over the death of the Marchioness, who had provided for her amply, she lived very happily, and is living very happily with Stephen Vere.

Certainly, Mrs. Henry Vere is quite as happy as Fanny, and perhaps a little more so; because she has got a sturdy young Harry or two, and because our friend, Bob—we can't tell you his other name, or else you would drop in at his nice house at Pimlico, taste his half-and-half, and look admiringly at his better-half—we say, and because Bob has married Susan's tall sister, and is extremely jolly—at least, if you ask him whether he is or not, he is sure to answer you, "I think so!"

By the way, Susan's sister "Emly" told Mrs. Spencer, who is now housekeeper to the Marquis of Broadlands, in a great grand house in Eaton square, that the double barness fold was by no means a too strong manifestation of ecstacy, and that she had come to think that it was a very nice sort of institution.

Of Daddy Windy it will, perhaps, suffice to say, that he still lives in the same ambrosial quarter, Bermondsey; still enjoys his evening pipe and his warm "Jamaiker". He was grieved at the loss of Floret, but after all he bore her departure stoically, for he said to himself, when he found that she had taken flight:

"Pard'ner, she's a little too old in the tooth for us. Ve wants another young primrose as 'll sell wilets, and pull in the suv'rins as if they was candy drops—that's what we want, pard'ner, that's what we want, though I'm most afeard ve shan't lay hold on another Vite Rose!"

We are unable to give a favorable account of Nat Ferret. His exertions to get a "stunnin' pub" and the fair party were not crowned with success.

The fair party, that is Fane, unhappily listened to the persuasions of Lord Nihilalbum, and went off with him. Nat met her magnificently dressed, riding in a brougham, and endeavored to speak to her, but she ordered her coachman to horsewhip him, which he did.

Nat took to drinking, squandered away the money he had saved, and is now one of the



disreputable parties who prowl about race-courses, and who are significantly termed "Welchers".

Lord Nihilalbum never got over the wound he received from the pistol-bullet of Lord Victor. His horse one day threw him, he broke his arm in the place where it had been previously splintered, and so badly that he was compelled to have it amputated. He delayed it through want of courage so long that it mortified and carried him off. He left the frail Fane unprovided for, and she is now in misery lamenting that she is not a virtuous publican's wife.

Susan Vere, after her return from Canada, received a communication from Hatty Marr, full of inquiries and full of information. It informed her that Hatty had gone out to New Zealand, and had there married a Judge—a good judge he was, too, to secure so nice a girl as Hatty.

And now, reaching up to the end of the year, we are called upon to record the marriage of Hyde Vaughan and Ida, with every prospect of future felicity to both. And not only that, but the wedding also of Lady Adela Trevor, who was also united to one who loved her for herself, and whom she loved for every qualification which could possibly endear him to the heart of a woman.

And having provided thus for all, we arrive, in conclusion, at the wedding of Floret and Lord Victor—we use the two names by which they are best known to the reader.

The wedding was a brilliant one, the company numerous and distinguished, the appearance of Floret dazzling, the homage she received such as almost to turn her brain, and the congratulations showered upon her were of a kind to make her proud indeed.

Yet she felt happier still when, one week afterward, seated alone with Lord Victor upon a grassy knoll, weaving a bouquet from flowers which he had gathered from the vicinity of a clear pool near to them, she placed her hand upon his shoulder, and said, pointing to it: "It was there, Victor, you first saw me,

shoeless, penniless. Now I am your wife. I was then happy to attract your notice, happy that you received my poor offering of wild flowers—"

He placed his hand in his bosom, and from beneath his vest, attached to a gold chain, he brought out a flat gold locket of some size.

"Behold the flowers!" he exclaimed, and he kissed them.

She placed her lips to his cheek.

"I little thought then," she said, with tears in her eyes, "to be what I am, and as I am now. I am so—so happy."

"Bless you, my darling wife!" he exclaimed, folding his arms about her. "I love you truthfully, and I hope, Floret, like a true man—and holding you in my arms thus, loving you devotedly as I do—believing that as you are a priceless treasure to me, so I am to you—let me express my fervent hope that we may never cease to love each other as dearly as we do now while we are spared to each other; in that case, dearest, as you no longer are, so you can no longer be a Poor Girl!"

"And, Victor, dearest," she rejoined, fondly, "let us in remembrance of my strange history, take upon ourselves the grateful duty, whenever and wherever we can perform it, of making our way among the toilers, the workers, the needle-slaves—the Poor Girls: those who need help and cannot help themselves; those whom we, out of our ample store, can help, and whose heavy burdens we can lighten with simple monetary assistance, whose cares we can alleviate, whose griefs we can assuage, whose miseries we can remove. There are many Florets in the world, dear, dear Victor—many who need aid more grievously, more desperately than I did; let us seek them out, and remember, dearest, while we mingle with them, how sorely I needed a friend, so that we may be to them friends and helpers—"

"And make them bless the circumstances," he whispered, as, kissing her fondly, he pressed her to his heart, "that, like themselves, you, you, my own love, were once a POOR GIRL."

THE END.







**NRLF**

**14 DAY USE**

**RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED**

**LOAN DEPT.**

This book is due on the last date stamped below,  
or on the date to which renewed. Renewals only:  
Tel. No. 642-3405

Renewals may be made 4 days prior to date due.  
Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

Due end of SUMMER Period  
subject to recall after —

SEP 11 1971

OCT 2 1971

**REC'D LD NOV 3 71-10 AM 4 1**

**SENT ON ILL**

**SEP 25 1995**

**U. C. BERKELEY**

LD21A-50m-2, '71  
(P2001s10)476-A-32

General Library  
University of California  
Berkeley





